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Student Culture at Wheaton College: Understanding Student Life on an Evangelical Christian College Campus

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

STUDENT CULTURE AT WHEATON COLLEGE:
UNDERSTANDING STUDENT LIFE ON AN
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN COLLEGE CAMPUS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY
KEVIN D. CUMINGS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
MAY, 1997

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In conducting a research study of student culture, I was continually reminded of the significance of my own cultural surroundings. I am grateful to many people who have contributed to my “culture” these past few years in very positive, supportive ways, enabling me to complete this project. To list the many sources of encouragement, guidance, and friendship would be virtually impossible. However, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a select group of individuals to whom I am most deeply indebted.

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DEDICATION

To Tina Lee Cumings

To the one chosen by God to complete me, my help-mate, my partner, my best friend, my wife . . . to you I dedicate this work.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and describe the student culture at an Evangelical Christian liberal arts college. Specifically, this study investigated the values, beliefs, and behaviors informing and animating the student culture and subcultures at Wheaton College (IL). In addition to describing differences and similarities within the student culture, the study examined the relationship between student culture and the institution's "official culture" to discern how students make sense of various aspects of its Evangelical Christian mission.

To comprehend the complex nuances of student culture, this study utilized a qualitative emergent case study design grounded in a phenomenological approach to inquiry. Data were primarily collected via 40 individual student interviews and four focus group interviews between January, 1996 and February, 1997. Data were analyzed for predominant themes regarding the general student culture, subcultures, and interaction with "official" culture. ✓

Results of the study revealed general student culture similarities in students' attempts to "master" four dimensions of college: religious life, academic life, social life, and life of activities. A religious emphasis was pervasive within the student culture, even though students displayed a continuum of responses: some accepted and incorporated it, some incorporated an image without entirely accepting it, and some didn't accept it or attempt to incorporate a religious emphasis. The religious focus also impacted students' responses to other aspects of college life, particularly as associated with a "perfect standard" for such things as grade acquisition, excelling with individual achievements, and fostering "depth" in relationships.

The study also explored differences among Wheaton students by identifying four predominant student subcultures (or typologies): Christian service, college life, counterculture, and marginalized student types. These findings confirm that Evangelical

Christian college student culture is far from monolithic and that students respond more directly (either positively or negatively) to fellow students than to institutional influence.

This study is significant insofar as it offered an extensive description of students at a distinctive type of educational institution, providing a comprehensive understanding of how student culture and subcultures impact the real learning and educational experience of students on an Evangelical Christian college campus.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Studies of American higher education have acknowledged the influence of peers on the educational development of college students (Becker, 1963; Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991; Newcomb, 1962). College students experience significant developmental changes in the short period of four years, moving from the narrow, relatively simplistic and egocentric view of youth to the broader, more complex and multi-connected world view of adults (Durst & Schaeffer, 1992). These changes happen so rapidly that many college students feel like they exist in a perpetual state of flux. College can be a time of considerable anxiety and change. Parents and other adults may influence many of the transitional decisions of students, but for the most part, changes for students occur largely in cultural and social isolation from adults. Students spend most of their time with each other. Therefore, it is no surprise that during times of growth and uncertainty, college students seek advice and assistance from those most similar to themselves - - their peers.

Peer relationships develop from shared experiences, shared interests, and a common environment. As college students seek to establish their independence, make new friends, and master complicated new environments, they are drawn together to create a strong social cohesiveness (Dalton, 1989). The bonds that are formed develop into common understandings and working agreements as to what constitutes proper and reasonable behavior for the roles of students (Becker & Geer, 1958). Students develop shared perspectives on the relative importance of such things as academic performance, extracurricular activities, social life and work (Kuh, 1990). Over time, these shared perspectives provide thick and thin guidelines for not only how to get an education but also what exactly an education means (Van Maanen, 1987). In this manner, a student's peer

group becomes a significant influence upon the quality of a student's college experience (Bushnell, 1962).

This relational web of peer interactions and shared perspectives forms the foundation for student culture. Broadly stated, student culture can be understood as the values, beliefs, attitudes, rituals and activities that shape how students interact with and make meaning of their world. Hughes, Becker and Geer (1962) describe student culture as:

. . . a whole body of conceptions and images of problems and situations and of proper and justifiable solutions of them arrived at by the students; in part passed along from one generation of students to another, in part apparently rediscovered - - or at least reinforced - - by each succeeding generation as they pass through the same experiences (p. 518).

Student culture is probably not something that becomes formalized or codified, nor is individual thinking and behavior within student culture subjected to a formal judicial system or set of enforceable sanctions (Sandin, 1982). Rather, the culture of students is based upon tacit assumptions, and remains largely invisible to outsiders. Students are aware of their culture because it shapes their psychological habitat and influences not only what students see in their environment but also how they see it (Dalton, 1989). Without even being consciously aware of it, a student typically derives a sense of identity and purpose from the prevalent patterns evident within his/her student culture. For those who are not a part of the psychological habitat of students, it may be difficult to comprehend the meaning of many observable student behaviors and rituals. The fact that much of the meaning within student culture remains hidden leads many to either overlook its influence or underestimate its impact (Dalton, 1989).

Particularly in college and university settings, student culture is not something that can be ignored. It exerts a powerful force on many aspects of college life, including what a student learns, because it influences the kinds of people with whom a student spends time and the values and attitudes to which the student is exposed (Baird, 1987; Kuh, 1993; Weidman, 1989). It influences students' perceptions regarding such things as: patterns of eating, sleeping, studying and socializing; tacit understanding about what activities on campus are status enhancing or status degrading; the norms determining acceptable

behavior in and out of the classroom; the student grapevine that tells students what classes are challenging, and professors from whom to take classes and those to avoid (Kuh & Hall, 1993). In brief, the student culture becomes a standard by which a student evaluates what is useful or important about a college environment. Taking on a life of its own, student culture may even dilute or redefine what are expressed as the educational objectives imposed by the college officialdom (Sandin, 1982). Thus Whiting (1964) makes a distinction between an official culture of a college - - composed of faculty, administration and staff - - and an unofficial or student culture. He argues that:

The former embraces the rules and regulations, the customs and symbols, the objectives and tools connected with the officially recognized curricular and extracurricular activities. In response to this the students develop sets of behavioral and attitudinal patterns which in essence constitute a redefining, within the framework of their society, of the orientations, aims and imperatives of the official culture, in terms of what must be done, ought to be done, may be done, and must not be done (p. 514).

While the educational goals and intentions of an institution may be clearly and thoroughly stated by the faculty and administration, students may not in fact share the same assumptions or understandings. The student culture defines the limits of accommodation students are prepared to make toward the expectations of the "official culture," and provides what Whiting (1964) refers to as a "social sanction for the reduced view of an educational program" (p. 515). In other words, a student who fails to meet faculty expectations may avoid feelings of disapprobation or guilt as long as his/her performance falls within the accepted norms of the peer group (Sandin, 1982). Becker and Geer (1958) therefore conclude that student culture serves two basic purposes: "that of providing a means of accommodation for the students to the difficulties of school life, and that of providing the basis for redirection of effort on the students' part, possibly in defiance of faculty standards and ideals" (p. 80).

What is significant, and perhaps most disturbing, about student culture is the degree to which it is not only different from the "official collegiate culture" but may in fact become estranged from the academic life of an institution (Horowitz, 1987; Moffatt, 1989). Newcomb and Wilson (1966) observed that "the domain of peer group influence overlaps but little with the domain of the intellect" (p. 144). Katz (1981) notes that the classroom,

which could be one important means of bringing students together, is almost universally reported not to be the place where students get to know each other. As Boyer (1987) states:

We found a great separation, sometimes to the point of isolation, between academic and social life on campus. Colleges like to speak of community, and yet what is being learned in most residence halls today has little connection to the classrooms; indeed, it may undermine the educational purposes of the college (p. 5).

This principle also holds true for other dimensions of the collegiate experience. For example, Sandin (1982) contends that student culture can affect an institution's religious focus as much as its academic objectives. He states that:

the religious tone of a school is not established merely by the official adoption of a theological or ethical norm, or by administrative pronouncements or regulations, or by the domination of a devout faculty, or by the establishment of curricular requirements in religion . . . what is needed is a student culture which reinforces this official religious character (p. 150).

This realization carries significant implications for all aspects of a college or university's espoused mission, as many institutional norms, practices, values, beliefs, and meanings (in short, the institutional culture), may be redefined or even ignored when filtered through the interpretive grid work of the student culture.

Of course, the degree to which the student culture contrasts with the intentions of the "official culture" may depend upon varying distinctions of both the institutions and the students. In relation to students, it would be erroneous to assume that student culture is somehow homogeneous - - that all students share the same perspectives about the college experience. Students bring to college a rich array of cultural backgrounds from which they have been socialized during formative years. Once in college, these cultural identities shape their perceptions and responses to both the institutional culture and the diverse cultures represented among their fellow students. Specifically, precollege factors such as educational background, socioeconomic status, political and religious beliefs, goals for the college experience, and psychological characteristics and needs may all impact the types of student perspectives formed in college (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The resulting collegiate student culture, therefore, is a mixture of student types reflecting a diversity of perspectives

on students' relationships to the educational experience. Given the fact that the collegiate student population is becoming increasingly diverse - - with larger minority and non-traditional students represented - - it is plausible that student cultures on college campuses are becoming even more complex and fragmented, making it that much more difficult to understand the interaction of students with an institution's "official culture."

Institutional factors also affect the nature of student cultures. The distinctiveness of the institutional mission can dictate or influence the type of student who will choose to matriculate at that institution. The more distinctive the institutional ethos, the more likely that constraints on student cultures will be felt. For example, student cultures at highly selective institutions tend to be more academically-oriented and less involved with traditional "collegiate" experiences. Also, institutions with distinctive missions frequently attract more homogeneous student populations which, in turn, mediate the types of student perspectives represented (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Other institutional characteristics such as the size of the institution, residential propinquity, or governmental structure may also have implications for the development of student cultures. Large universities may hinder the interaction necessary for the development of explicit student cultures (Clark & Trow, 1966), unless mediated by substructures within the university such as living-learning housing units, fraternities and sororities, and commuter clubs (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Highly residential campuses provide extended opportunities for peer interaction, and students who live near one another, attend class together, or are isolated from non-students are more likely to develop shared understandings and attitudes which form the basis of distinct student cultures (Hughes, Becker, & Geer, 1962). Students' motivation level will also impact the rate of peer group development and the strength of the bonds among members. LeVine (1966) notes that "many students describe themselves as lonely and isolated during their first weeks or months at college. . . Such feelings of isolation can lead to a strong drive to be affiliated with, and dependent on, other students" (p. 119). Moreover, students' involvement in institutional governance can also impact the nature of the student culture created. Lack of meaningful student involvement may encourage a dominant student culture that is in conflict with institutional priorities (Kuh & Whitt).

Given these numerous factors, it is no surprise that a great variety of student cultures can be found within higher education. For every institution, the types and intensities of student cultures represented may vary. The difficulty of comprehending such variety and complexity has caused many faculty and administrators to overlook or belittle any considerations of cultural dynamics. However, given the impact that student culture can have in shaping the educational experiences of students, institutions of higher education who desire to improve educational effectiveness and accountability cannot overlook the importance and impact of student cultures on their campuses. As faculty and administrators become more knowledgeable about the various perceptions within the student culture in their institutions, they will be in a better position to create and/or improve campus environments which foster student learning and personal development (Love, Hardy, Kuh, & MacKay, 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the student culture represented at a particular type of collegiate institution - - namely an Evangelical Christian liberal arts college. Specifically, in this study I sought to identify and describe the values, beliefs, and behaviors that informed and animated the student culture (and student subcultures) at Wheaton College, an interdenominational, residential liberal arts institution consisting of approximately 2,250 undergraduate students (primarily traditionally-aged). Secondly, I examined the relationship between the student culture and Wheaton's "official culture" - - as defined by official publications of Wheaton College - - in order to discern how students incorporated, rejected, or redefined various aspects of the institution's Evangelical Christian mission, values, beliefs, and practices in their daily lives.

Whereas there is great diversity among Evangelical Christian liberal arts institutions,¹ all have a unique mission among institutions of higher education - - the

¹ These types of institutions are most clearly identified by their membership in the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities, an association created for the promotion and support of Christian higher education. This association currently consists of ninety member institutions geographically located throughout the continental United States.

integration of Christian faith with all aspects of life and learning exposed through a liberal education (Holmes, 1987). Because of this distinctive mission and many other similar features associated with these institutions, it may appear as though the types of students attending such institutions would be fairly homogeneous. The fact that many of the institutions require their students to sign a statement of faith for admission would indicate that students attracted to these institutions most likely share similar religious convictions and beliefs. Moreover, since many are private institutions and typically not well endowed, their cost of enrollment tends to restrict the number of students from lower socioeconomic groups. Some of the exclusivity of these institutions flows unintentionally from their unique cultural foundations (Smith, 1987). Nonetheless, the majority of their students typify the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a Caucasian, middle-class, suburban type of culture.

Despite significant indications of student homogeneity at Evangelical Christian colleges, many institutions also reflect a considerable amount of diversity among their student populations. For one, students come from many different denominational backgrounds and share diversified theological and philosophical perspectives within the Christian world-view. Additionally, evangelical students are representative of a larger youth culture, and as such, present some of the same changing generational trends characteristic of the larger American society.

It would therefore be naive to assume that the student culture(s) represented on these campuses are completely homogeneous and rudimentary. Similarly, it would be presumptuous to assume that the experiences of these students unequivocally conform to the educational and developmental goals, intentions, and demands of Evangelical Christian colleges. Ironically enough, Hunter & Hammond (1984) argue that it is because of institutional homogeneity (what they label as insulation from secular influences) that evangelical commitments among students on evangelical campuses seem to weaken or even disintegrate rather than consolidate and strengthen. They contend that:

. . . when the plausibility structure for a particular world view is strong and uncontested by rival ideologies, . . . there is no ever-present external threat to the adherents' view of reality. The believer's sphere of discourse is protected from significant disruptions, and the believer's defensive posture

can be relaxed. . . Yet, precisely in the safety of this institutional setting, 'internal secularization,' as Luckmann called it, can take place. Education, even Evangelical education, weakens the tenacity to which Evangelicals hold on to their world view. Evangelical education creates its own contaminating effects (p. 233).

It is plausible, therefore, that the experiences of evangelical students on evangelical campuses may not always correspond precisely with the evangelical missions of their institutions. These institutions may feel very confident about their formal mission-related intentions, as they provide clear mission statements, cogent policies, student handbooks, college catalogs, syllabi, and a host of other stated or unstated materials which project the vision of Christian higher education. Yet, until the experiences of students and the formation of student cultures are sufficiently understood, only a partial assessment of an institution's total learning environment and mission effectiveness will be available.

Any attempt to describe the experiences of students and the formation of student culture(s) must take many factors into consideration. Culture is an elusive concept, and its impact upon a college environment is extremely complex and difficult to comprehend. In order to fully grasp the implications of student culture, an investigator must become intimately acquainted with students' psychological and physical habitats (Kuh, 1990). Qualitative research methods are considered most appropriate for identifying complex relationships between institutional features (size, mission, values), student cultures, and the behavior of individual and groups of students (Fetterman, 1984). Qualitative methods are more likely to discover what students actually do as opposed to what they say they do (Kuh, 1990). Accordingly, in this study I utilized a qualitative approach to inquiry first to clarify and describe the student culture (and subcultures) at Wheaton College and, second, to explore the relationship between this student culture and Wheaton's distinctive evangelical "official culture."

Research Questions

In keeping with a concern in qualitative research about entering the field with *a priori* assumptions, I chose to generate research questions on an iterative basis as data collection progressed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

However, a number of research questions proved relevant to this study and offered some direction for preliminary investigation. These included:

1. What is the student culture of Wheaton College? How do students make sense of, describe, and enact this culture?
2. To the extent that there are differences in students' perceptions of and experiences with the student culture, how can these differences best be explained (i.e., student subcultures)?
3. To what extent do students (within the broader student culture and in various subcultures) accept, reject, or redefine the Evangelical Christian values, beliefs, and practices (i.e., the "official culture") of Wheaton College?

Definition of Terms

The following terms, as defined below, were used in this section:

1. *Evangelical*: Randall Balmer (1989) notes that this term has taken on many connotations and has been applied to numerous theological movements and positions. It was used in this study as an umbrella term to identify conservative Protestant institutions which emphasize a personalized commitment and response to the gospel message of Jesus Christ and look to the Bible as the divinely inspired, infallible, authoritative guide for faith and practice.

2. *Mission*: Mission refers to the broad, overall, long-term purpose of an institution that provides the rationale and guidelines for all institutional priorities and practices, representing the ends which the institution wishes to attain (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991). The mission of Evangelical Christian colleges is related to religious, philosophical beliefs upon which educational purposes are based.

3. *Culture*: Many scholars disagree on a definition of this term. Two of the most prevalent definitions of culture are:

a) “the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior” (Spradley, 1980, p. 6). From this perspective, culture embraces what people do, what people know, and what people make and use. The focus is upon an instrumental interpretation - - what a culture *is* or *does* (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

b) “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which (people) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973, p.89). This position emphasizes semiotics - - the study of signs in language - - which focuses upon a phenomenological orientation for the meanings that people attribute to events. Thus Geertz and Goodenough (1963) emphasize “thick description” and the “native’s point of view.” This perspective has an interpretive focus - - a sense of what the culture *has*, a sense of meaning for members about the organization of their work (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

This study, while acknowledging the complexities of defining the concept, attempted to remain more general and inclusive, incorporating both the instrumental and interpretive understandings of culture. Accordingly, this study adopted the definition of culture provided by Kuh and Whitt (1988) as:

persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus (p. iv).

4. **Subculture:** Culture is not monolithic, especially with regard to students. Students do not generally act collectively in total concert with one another. So what may be regarded as a homogeneous culture for some purposes, may upon closer examination reveal a plurality of heterogeneous subgroups, each valuing different interests and rewarding different activities (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Subcultures have therefore been defined as:

a normative-value system held by some group of persons who are in persisting interaction, who transmit the norms and values to newcomers by some communicational process and who exercise some sort of social control to ensure conformity to the norms. Furthermore, the normative-value

system of such a group must differ from the normative-value system of the larger, the parent or the dominant society (Bolton & Kammeyer, 1972, pp. 381-382).

With this definition, a distinction is typically made between student subcultures and other references to student groups such as affinity groups, reference groups, or peer groups (Kuh, 1990). The latter tend to have a short life span and are more transient, while subcultures tend to persist over time and demonstrate more explicit measures of social control. Most studies involved with student subcultures are not as restrictive in their use of the term as defined by Bolton and Kammeyer. In this study, a distinction was drawn between a student subculture and a student typology. Student groups that could be distinguished from one another and shared persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions were considered student subcultures. Moreover, the distinction between student culture and student subcultures in this study was based upon the degree to which the cultural dynamic under consideration was pervasive for the whole student population or only for a restricted student subgroup within that population.

5. Typology: A typology acts as a heuristic device for categorizing unique characteristics about cohort groups of students - - such as personality differences, interests, values, and behaviors. As such, typology refers to a more general classification of students, whereas student subculture refers to a specific group of students who persistently interact together.

Astin (1993a) also makes a distinction between a typology and a developmental or hierarchical classification of students. Such classification systems would include Perry's (1970) levels of intellectual and ethical development and Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development. In these systems, students are classified according to successive stages of higher development levels, with the higher stages being more desirable or "better" than lower stages. In contrast, a typology is more stylistic and descriptive than hierarchical. In other words, a specific typology of students is not considered better than others, just different. In fact, students may change from one typology classification to another, and not necessarily because of some linear, developmental process.

Significance of the Study

As noted by Becker (1972), Kuh (1990), and Spitzberg and Thorndike (1991), even though student cultures shape all aspects of campus life and are the primary vehicles for socializing newcomers, many colleges and universities steadfastly ignore their influence upon the real learning and educational experience of students. If educators are serious about providing a quality collegiate education, they cannot ignore the roles of student cultures on their campuses. They must seek to encourage those cultural elements among students that are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution and discourage other aspects that are counterproductive (Kuh, 1990). The first step to influencing student cultures is to identify and understand those student cultures. If a college or university is to serve its clients (students) effectively, it is crucial that it recognize and account for the cultures from which its students have come and the resultant culture that is created on its campus.

With this in mind, the practical significance of this research becomes readily apparent. Not only did this study clarify and reveal the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the student culture at Wheaton College (something which has not yet been extensively investigated and documented), it also shed light on how students accept, reject, or redefine various aspects of the college's evangelical mission. Such understandings can be especially useful to faculty and administration as they seek to design and implement curricula and campus programs.

This study also made two contributions to the scholarly literature. First it complemented and extended other recent efforts to understand and more fully describe the student cultures and subcultures at Evangelical Christian colleges (Schreck, 1995; Schreck, Moseman, Koch, Gerber Brinkman, & Warner, 1994). Second, since much of the extant research on Evangelical Christian college student culture has focused upon quantitative data from such sources as Astin's ongoing *Cooperative Institutional Research Project*, Rest's (1979) *Defining Issues Test*, or Pace's (1984) *College Student Experiences Questionnaire*, this qualitative study contributed a new perspective to the literature.

Several authors have noted that quantitative research has limitations for studies of student culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Crowson, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It

tends to be reductionistic and fails to uncover the global understandings captured within contextual meanings. It also restricts the kind of information that can be obtained and presents the results in the words of the researcher, not of those being researched. In this way, it is not flexible enough to uncover all of the nuances and hidden assumptions so prevalent within cultural understandings. Crowson (1987) notes that increased attention is being directed toward the use of research methods that probe into the complex subtleties of collegiate life, an environment now known to be much more complex than first imagined. With this in mind, this study used such qualitative techniques as participant observation, interviews with key informants, and document analysis, to probe into and document the assumptions and beliefs that animate and inform the student culture of an Evangelical Christian college.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Analytical Framework

A study of culture is difficult because culture is implicit. Cultural dynamics can be very complex and yet meanings and understandings attached to a culture can be hidden, even to members of the culture. For this reason, researchers of culture suggest investigating the multiple layers of culture. Masland (1985) argues that to understand culture in higher education, a researcher should attend most particularly to the visible and explicit manifestations of culture as found in the details of daily life. He offers four key “windows” for interpreting culture: sagas or stories; heroes and the examples they set; symbols and/or metaphors; and rituals. While informative, other researchers (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Manning, 1994) suggest that studies of culture must investigate elements of culture not always visible. Schein (1985) separated the myriad properties that constitute culture into four interrelated levels, ranging from more visible dimensions to those aspects of culture not immediately apparent. These four levels include: (1) artifacts, (2) perspectives, (3) strategic values, and (4) basic assumptions. These distinctions are commonly identified in many studies of culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Lundberg, 1990; Manning, 1993) and were used as the analytical framework for investigating student culture in this study.

Artifacts (physical, verbal, behavioral) compose the most visible level of a culture and include such properties as language, rituals, ceremonies, signs, and symbols (Morgan, 1986). Physical artifacts would include the physical layout, what is included in the built environment, and the condition, location, and spacing of facilities. Verbal artifacts are represented in the written and oral history of an institution as well as in such common forms of language as jargon, slang, sayings, slogans, and stories about heroes and events -

- some true, and some embellished to be mythical or saga-like (Clark, 1972; Kuh & Robinson, 1995). Behavioral artifacts include rituals and traditions which connect the past with the present and convey important values to a community (Kuh & Robinson).

The middle levels of cultural meaning are composed of perspectives and strategic values specific to a particular group. Perspectives are normative behavior patterns that define expectations and give direction to how things are done (Kuh & Robinson, 1995). Perspectives provide a sense of what is desired and what is considered taboo within a culture. For example, at an Evangelical Christian college, a common perspective is the expectation of weekly church attendance on Sunday.

Strategic values are the ideals most important to a particular group or context. They provide a sense of “what should be” as compared to “what is” (Schein, 1985). Many values are conscious and explicitly articulated, while others may be felt but not stated. Some values may also be espoused but not necessarily enacted (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Service to others would be a strategic value endorsed by many at an Evangelical Christian college.

Assumptions make up the core of a group’s culture. They are the tacit beliefs that members use to define their role, their relationships to others, and the nature of the organization in which they live (Kuh & Hall, 1993). They are foundational to a culture’s meaning - - defining the nature of human relationships, the nature of truth, and the nature of human activity for a culture (Kuh & Robinson, 1995). An example of a basic assumption would be a religious belief in God. Because assumptions are taken for granted and so basic to the reality formation of a culture, it is difficult to decipher their full meaning. However, tacit assumptions are important to understand because they determine how a group perceives, thinks, and feels about cultural realities.

Schein’s (1985) four levels of cultural analysis provided the framework through which the investigation of culture in this study was performed. Attention was first given to more visible and apparent manifestations of student culture at Wheaton College, but as the study progressed, questions were increasingly directed to the values and assumptions which formed the foundation or core of the students’ culture.

Selective Review of Relevant Literature

Research on student culture in higher education has taken many approaches. This review focuses specifically on those studies that directly examine and discuss student culture. According to Kuh (1990), the bulk of research on student culture was conducted in the 1950's and 1960's. In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in studying student cultures (Durst & Schaeffer, 1992; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Moffatt, 1989; Willimon & Naylor, 1995). These studies are much more complicated than those conducted in the 1960's, in large measure because today's college students are considerably more heterogeneous. In 1989, only about one-sixth of the 12.7 million college and university students were between 18 and 23 years of age, enrolled full-time, and lived in campus housing (Kuh, 1990). For this reason, contemporary studies of student culture take into consideration many varied reference groups (even external to college life) when assessing student culture at an institution of higher education.

This review of the literature considers relevant research and writings on 1) historical reviews of student culture, 2) student typologies, and 3) case studies of student culture. It also includes a review of relevant literature on student culture in Evangelical Christian colleges.

Historical Reviews

Horowitz's (1987) portrait of undergraduate life in American colleges and universities is, perhaps, one of the most comprehensive treatments of student culture in the higher education literature. It has become a seminal work for many other studies in the field. Using the tools of historical analysis, Horowitz identified three dominant student cultures. She labeled the first as "college life" or the "culture of the college man." Emerging in the late eighteenth century, college men reacted against the harsh restrictions of faculty and administrative controls. Coming from wealthy backgrounds, many "college men" did not see the relevance of the classical curriculum. In protest, they organized an alternative way of life in the extracurriculum, one that had little use for the lessons of the classroom. The epitome of this college life was found in the development of fraternities (and later sororities), but also included sports, publications, clubs, and other student

generated activities. A competitive spirit and hedonistic lifestyle became the norm for a college man. Knowledge from the classroom was ignored.

The culture of college life was also adaptable. Recognizing the influence of “college men” on their campuses, many faculty and administrators at the turn of the twentieth century incorporated the extracurriculum into the life of the college, giving students the power to serve in positions of student leadership. Thus, the focus of the culture shifted from one of hostility toward authority to one of cooperation. Enrollment of women students also created a comparable “college life” culture for women, even though the focus of the female culture was more upon “college as a way station to a proper marriage” (Horowitz, 1987, p. 200).

A second dominant student culture also emerged in the late eighteenth century. Students labeled as “outsiders” tried to avoid the hedonism of “college life” and were more serious about the life of the classroom. Chided as “grinds” by the college men, these outsiders were typically from poor backgrounds, so college was viewed as a means of upward mobility. Learning from faculty was important in preparation for a future career, usually teaching or ministry. “Whatever pleasures the four years might hold were incidental to the primary pursuit - - an education to lead to advancing in the world” (1987, p. 62). This culture, too, was adaptable. According to Horowitz, in the 1970’s a variant type of “new outsider” emerged. Typically from affluent backgrounds, these students feared downward social mobility, and “in their anxiety to achieve marks that would get them into professional school, the “new outsiders” went to college less to learn than to make the grade” (1987, p. 268).

The third dominant student culture Horowitz identified - - the “college rebels” - - appeared around the turn of the twentieth century. Reacting against both the anti-intellectual stance of college men and the anti-social character of outsiders, these students tried to combine the concerns of an outside world (politics, economics, the arts, etc.) with the life of the mind. “Unlike the clubman, the rebels perceived that the campus was not all . . . But unlike the outsiders, the rebels fought back. They challenged the college man on his own turf. The rewards were the college newspaper and campus government” (1987, p. 86). The rebels were serious about their studies and learning, not as preparation for a

career, but as part of life itself. Rebels have most notably been recognized as the student radicals of the 1960's. Horowitz also believes that a recent variant of this category - - the "quiet rebels" - - has appeared on college campuses. These are introspective students who are brave enough to question the meaning of reality without the fracas of political banter.

Typologies

Historical and contemporary portraits of students and college life reveal that student culture is not monolithic. Although student culture can be understood partially in terms of students' collective responses to problems commonly encountered in a college experience, this macroscopic view exaggerates the degree to which students actually do act collectively. As Feldman (1972) argues:

Observers of the campus scene have long noted a certain "atomism" of the student body . . . The student culture, when closely inspected, is seen as a plurality of heterogeneous subgroups, each valuing different interests and rewarding different activities. Thus a number of student subgroupings may be distinguished, ranging from large and amorphous student subcultures through smaller, relatively formal student groups (based on a variety of activities) to even smaller, informal friendships cliques and friendship pairs (p. 333-4).

Researchers attempting to classify these student groupings have developed various typologies of student subcultures. Whether these typologies are, in fact, subcultures or simply affinity groups, peer groups, or reference groups is a point of debate in the literature. Bolton and Kammeyer (1972), for example, have criticized some typologies as merely describing students' general orientations; they do not view the resulting groups as meeting the criteria for subcultures (i.e., persistent interaction, processes of socialization, mechanisms for social control, and norms that differ from the parent culture). Many of these empirically derived typologies have not produced evidence that students assigned to the various categories interact with others in the same category or are aware of their common orientation (Kuh, 1990). Accordingly, typologies can best be thought of as heuristic frameworks for identifying some of the factors and processes by which reference groups shape the behavior of their members, even though these groups may not necessarily develop into full subcultures.

The best known typology of student subcultures was developed by Clark and Trow (1966) and involved a study of undergraduates in the 1950's and early 1960's at the University of California, Berkeley. Based upon their observations, they proposed that college life reflected two basic orientations: "identification with the college" and "involvement with ideas." Combinations of these two orientations yielded four dominant student subcultures: academic, collegiate, vocational, and nonconformist. Members of academic and collegiate subcultures identify closely with their institutions, but the collegiate subculture (unlike the academic subculture) tends to be indifferent to involvement with ideas, focusing instead upon extracurricular pursuits. The nonconformist and academic subcultures are both interested in ideas and the life of the mind, but nonconformists tend to be detached from the institution, identifying more with off-campus endeavors and groups. Students in the vocational subculture demonstrate limited interest in either ideas or the institution. For them, higher education is simply a ticket to a better job and more comfortable lifestyle (Clark & Trow).

Feldman and Newcomb (1969) examined Clark and Trow's typology in relationship to a number of other classifications, including Newcomb's own schema (scholar, creative individualist, wild one, political activist, social group, and leader) (Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks, & Warwick, 1967) as well as Keniston's (1965) more impressionistic groupings (professionalist, activist, disaffiliate, big man on campus, apprentice, underachiever, and gentlemen-in-waiting).

Two other major studies on student subculture typologies have been conducted since the 1960's. In a study of Yale undergraduates, Tabor and Hackman (1976) identified twelve distinct student subcultures. Those subcultural group members who were considered "successful" within the institutional context included the leader, scholar, careerist, grind, artist, athlete, and socializer. The five groups whose members exhibited "unsuccessful" attributes were the disliked, extreme grind, alienated, unqualified, and directionless.

In the early 1980's, Katchadourian and Boli (1985) conducted a longitudinal study of Stanford University students which led to the development of a student typology based upon academic orientation. Five categories of students were identified: careerists - - those

for whom college is primarily a means to prepare for a vocation; intellectuals - - those for whom college is a place to broaden academic interests and develop intellectual capacities; strivers - - those who value both a liberal education and career preparation; the unconnected - - those who for no apparent reason remain detached from their college education; and a group of other students who did not fit into any type of classification (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Case Studies

The formation, maintenance, and potency of student subcultures is affected by characteristics of both students and organizations. Influential student characteristics include precollege characteristics and acquaintance, propinquity, and similarity of attitudes, values, interests and problems (Bushnell, 1962; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Organizational factors that affect student cultures include the institutional ethos, interests of persons within the institution, authority structure, and institutional size and complexity (Clark & Trow, 1966; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Because these student and organizational characteristics are unique to each individual institution, characteristics of student cultures may vary markedly from any national or generalized typology of students. For this reason, researchers have conducted individual case studies of particular collegiate settings in order to understand the specific nuances of meaning found within an institution without attempting to develop some form of typology describing all students or student cultures. Understanding institutional distinctions for student cultures is particularly significant for institutions with special missions, such as the military academies, engineering and technical colleges, and institutions with a pervasive religious orientation (Kuh, 1990).

A foundational case study of student culture was performed by a team of sociologists (Becker, Hughes, Geer, & Strauss, 1961) on a medical school in the late 1950's. Using daily interviews and observations in classes, wards, laboratories, and operating theaters at the School of Medicine of the University of Kansas, these sociologists were able to capture the multiple realities of medical student life. Operating from the theoretical assumptions of symbolic interactionism, these researchers attempted to "work with an open theoretical scheme in which variables were to be discovered rather than with a scheme in which variables decided on in advance would be located and their consequences

isolated and measured” (1961, p. 18). They were interested in understanding what a medical school did to medical students, besides providing them with a technical education. Particularly, they attempted to understand the influence of student culture upon the collective experience of individual students. Interestingly, they accomplished this by studying phenomena that seemed to produce group tension and conflict because “it seemed that the study of tensions was most likely to reveal basic elements of the relationships in which the medical student was involved” (1961, p. 21). These points of controversy helped the researchers to “discover how things work when they do work well”; discoveries, they suggested, “that are more difficult to make in situations of harmony because people are more likely to take them for granted and less likely to discuss them” (1961, p. 21). This study was significant for not only identifying the impact of culture upon the “meaning-making” process of medical students, but also because of its use of innovative and ground-breaking qualitative research methods.

A second incipient study of college student culture was conducted by Bushnell (1962) between 1954 and 1958. Bushnell approached the student culture at Vassar College as an anthropologist - - gathering information through a combination of research techniques (observation, participation, and utilization of informants). He spent considerable time with students carefully observing the daily, weekly and yearly “rounds” of student life. Bushnell was particularly interested in the “content of peer-group norms, in the whole configuration of attitudes, values, and ways of behaving that constitute student culture” (1962, p. 465). In his study he identified two predominant cultures within any American college - - a student culture and an academic culture (faculty and administrators). According to him, the faculty have accepted the task of “acculturating” the “underdeveloped nation” of students, while students tend to be much more caught up with the “enculturation” that happens within their own peer group. Bushnell concluded in his study that students tend to resist the “acculturation” of the academic culture

A third major exploratory case study of student culture in the late 1950’s was conducted by Wallace (1966) at a small, residential liberal arts college identified as Midwest College. Wallace sought to understand how students became assimilated into the institution’s campus culture. Specifically, he used sociometric research techniques to

investigate the social influences of student culture upon the “interpersonal environment” of an institution. A surprising discovery of his research was that most attitudinal change among entering freshmen occurs within the first seven weeks of their college experience. He asserted that during this time period, the influence of adults is overcome by co-student influence. Wallace’s research also revealed that the college socialization process challenged freshmen to learn organizational values and norms from two different and even confrontational cultures: non-freshmen adolescent students and adult faculty members. As such, it implied that cultural continuity among students happened “via the transmission of culture from one generation to the next, rather than via the independent re-creation of culture by each generation in turn” (1966, p. 185). It also demonstrated that the values of faculty and student cultures varied. Generally speaking, “faculty members influenced freshmen toward greater emphasis on getting high grades, while the culture of the student system pressed them away from such an emphasis” (1966, p. 186).

A fourth major research study during this time period was Scott’s (1965) sociological examination of ten fraternities and sororities at the University of Colorado. Aimed at “discovering how personal values enter into various organizational processes” (p. i), Scott attempted to describe how individual students came to take part in a preestablished group (student culture). He argued that Greek organizations represented distinctive student subcultures and that these fraternities and sororities had a significant impact upon the socialization process and value formation of incoming students. Although attempting to begin his study directly “in the field,” Scott was also dependent upon sociometric research techniques and descriptive statistics for his research methodology.

Gottlieb & Hodgkins (1968) attempted to respond to criticisms regarding the impact of college upon student values and attitudes. To accomplish this task, they chose to research student culture as a distinctive sociocultural system within a college community. Their study utilized a survey instrument for a large population of students attending a large, Midwestern public university in the spring of 1962. They attempted to categorize students according to Clark and Trow’s (1966) typology of students and identify distinctive attitudes and values for each group. Their findings supported Clark and Trow’s typology. The study also demonstrated that the value orientation of students upon entrance to college had a

significant impact upon their formation of values in college. They also found that three of the student subcultures (nonconformist, vocational and collegiate) tended to be alienated from the value orientations of the college community, while the academic subculture held a value orientation similar to that of the college community. Gottlieb and Hodgkins also asserted that generally speaking, the nonconformist subculture had a “humanistic” and “intellectual” value orientation, the collegiate subculture had a “materialistic” value orientation, and the academic and vocational tended to fall somewhere in between.

Bolton and Kammeyer (1967) attempted to investigate cultural values of students, but insisted that college students did not fit the criteria of a subculture, especially as defined by Clark and Trow’s (1966) typology of students. Instead, they argued that students could be examined according to “role orientations” as students entered into various role performances or acts relative to a particular student role. To demonstrate their point, they analyzed students’ “bull sessions” to illustrate how role orientations influence the way students spend their time.

Leemon’s (1972) account of the process of recruitment, training, and eventual induction of a group of young men into the membership of a Greek letter social fraternity was an attempt to utilize more inductive, ethnographic research methods. Living as a guest at a campus fraternity of a college in the northeastern United States, Leemon spent one year (1963) observing and recording the initiation rites of a college social fraternity. The study utilized both participant observation and interviews for data collection. From these data, Leemon revealed the inner dynamics of a student subculture and the rites of passage unique to it. The study vividly portrayed the dilemmas and ambiguities that accompany the dynamics of separation, transition, and incorporation of students into a distinctive subculture.

The most noteworthy contemporary empirical study of student culture is Moffatt’s (1989) study of students and student culture at Rutgers University in the late 1970’s and 1980’s. Moffatt investigated the nature of student culture as it related to “coming of age” issues such as autonomy, individualism, interpersonal relations, and academic demands in college. In addition to conducting 130 observations of residence hall life over two different academic years, he also referenced student diaries, photographs, documents and student

papers from his classes. From his investigations, Moffatt concluded that student culture in the 1980's was heavily influenced by general American culture and especially by a nationally defined media-born youth culture (Moffatt, 1991). According to Moffatt, student culture in college today can be characterized as being about work and play, autonomy, private pleasures, extracurriculum, and friends and lovers.

A second contemporary study of student culture was conducted by Durst and Schaeffer (1992) on a small, liberal arts college in Florida. Because they felt that student culture was discrete and worthy of study in its own right, they attempted to analyze student life from the inside - - from the students' point of view rather than from a preconceived notion of who students are or what they should be. In the anthropological tradition, they utilized four types of data-gathering techniques (participant observation, formal student discussion groups, several quantifiable student questionnaires, and two indices - - one of self-esteem and one of peer relationships). They were surprised to find many hidden meanings among the student culture regarding the way that students conducted their socialization process. In particular, their research focused upon three significant findings related to student development, dating customs, and friendship groups. They observed that students' development followed a pattern similar to a life cycle, proceeding through five overlapping phases with little actual connection to the typical classification of four academic years of college. Second, they learned that dating customs among college students did not follow traditional patterns for dating. Rather, students focused upon a process referred to as "hooking up." Last, they noticed that peer pressure among college students was focused within students' friendship groups and took on many of the same characteristics as kinship groups.

Perhaps the most recent comprehensive study of student life was a collaborative effort by Willimon & Naylor (1995). Originally conducted as separate ethnographic studies at two different institutions (Duke University and Middlebury College), these two researchers came together to pool some of their results. Each trained in different disciplines (one in the humanities, and the other in social sciences), they attempted to take a holistic look into the life of students and their interaction with an institution of higher education. Through participant observation, student interviews, and document analysis, they ventured

into the life of students to gain a perception of academic life from the students' point of view. Their findings led them to conclude that students demonstrated three disturbing realities within the student culture - - problems with substance abuse, indolence, and excessive careerism. They also concluded that students struggle against an overriding sense of meaninglessness in student life and the feeling of abandonment by any real sense of community.

Literature on Student Culture in Evangelical Christian Colleges

The literature on student culture/subcultures within Evangelical Christian Colleges is scarce. Most of the research pertaining to students at these institutions has related to assessments of such things as cognitive achievements, moral development, religious commitments, and identity formation (Van Wicklin, Burwell, & Butman, 1994). Until recently, limited attention has been given to understanding student cultures at Evangelical Christian colleges. Concerned about this, a group of five colleges within the Christian College Coalition (Bethel College, Fresno Pacific, Malone College, Mid-America Nazarene, and Palm Beach Atlantic) joined in a cooperative effort to begin examining student cultures as found within their institutions (Schreck, 1995; Schreck, Moseman, Koch, Gerber Brinkman, & Warner, 1994). While their research is still in process, a few of the institutions have presented preliminary results. The stated purposes of their research have been:

1. To describe the collection of cultures (i.e., subcultures) found in the student body.
2. To understand how these cultures affect ways students choose to come to college, live as members of the college body, and perform as students.
3. To investigate how students' cultural backgrounds affect the choices students make concerning professions and service as they leave college.
4. To understand how the teaching process, student development activities and programs, administrative procedures, and other aspects of an institution affect and are affected by the cultural background of students.

While intending to address some of these same issues, this study was more narrowly focused upon first, clarifying and describing a particular institutional student culture (and subcultures) and, second, exploring the relationship between this student culture and the distinctive evangelical “official culture” of Wheaton College.

Reflections on Literature Review: Gateway to the Study

A review of the literature revealed three limitations in this area of research which were addressed in this study. First, a large majority of the literature on student culture is dated. Conducted primarily in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, this research focused upon a fairly homogeneous student body and student culture which, of course, is no longer the case on today's college campuses. Contemporary research is needed to account for the changes in student characteristics as well as the influences of multiple reference groups upon the student culture (Moffatt, 1989). Second, with a few notable exceptions, investigations into student culture have primarily utilized quantitative research methods. As mentioned earlier, researchers are now realizing that qualitative research methods are equally (if not more) appropriate for identifying complex relationships between institutional features (size, mission, values), student cultures, and the behavior of individual and groups of students (Fetterman, 1984), in large measure because they are more likely to discover what students actually do as opposed to what they say they do (Kuh, 1990). For this reason, more qualitative studies are needed if we are to understand more fully the complexities of contemporary student culture(s). Third, a review of the literature demonstrated that very little empirical research has been conducted on students and student cultures within Evangelical Christian colleges. If institutions with this distinctive mission are to understand the impact of Christian higher education upon the experience of students, then additional research into student culture/subcultures is imperative. These three limitations of the literature served as the impetus for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological Approach to Inquiry

The inquiry methods recommended for a study of culture are qualitative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and most qualitative researchers reflect some sort of phenomenological perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This perspective - - which views reality as a social construct - - attempts to understand the interpretive meaning given by individuals to events and interactions in particular situations, focusing upon the subjective aspects of individual and group behavior. In so doing, it attempts to gain entry into the conceptual world of those studied (Geertz, 1973) in order to understand how they construct and ascribe meaning to events in their daily lives (Bogdan & Biklen).

Consonant with a phenomenological perspective, this study focused first and foremost on understanding how students actively interpret and attach meaning to various beliefs, symbols, activities, and events that define the student culture (and possible subcultures) at an Evangelical Christian college. Every attempt was made to understand students' lived experiences with the culture(s) from their own standpoints, or what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz refers to as "the native's point of view" (Geertz, 1973).

Study Design

In keeping with qualitative research objectives, this exploratory study adopted an emergent case study design. The general design of a case study is best depicted by a funnel (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). At the start of the study, questions were broadly stated and the investigation remained open to any possible sources or locations for data collection. As data were collected, decisions were continually made as to which endeavors constituted the most informative and appropriate to pursue. Decisions related to issues such as: how to

distribute the researcher's time, who to interview, what questions to ask, or what modifications were needed in the procedural design of this study. Over time, more specific decisions were made as to what settings, subjects, and themes should be examined. From broad exploratory beginnings, the research moved to more directed data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen).

This "emergent" design emphasizes an inductive approach to research, building understandings from the ground up (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research designs which begin with prior hypotheses and precise data categories are more likely to miss meaningful behaviors and important occurrences as they fortuitously appear (LeVine, 1970). Therefore, an emergent case study design was incorporated for this study in order to better probe the complex, often tacit nature of values, beliefs, and assumptions found within cultural processes (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Sampling Strategy

Although the fundamental goal of a qualitative research study is the holistic portrayal of a culture, it is obvious that inquiry into all dimensions of a culture is beyond the grasp of any one researcher (Crowson, 1987). For this reason, the subject matter needed to be narrowed to make this research study more manageable. Selective sampling was necessary. Restricting the study to a particular group or setting is always an artificial act, for it separates and distinguishes a part of the world that is normally integrated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Yet without setting some limits, this study (and many other studies) would have never been completed.

Site Selection

For a qualitative study of a culture, key decisions must be made concerning the location of where to conduct field research and whom to observe at the field site. With regard to the research site, Spradley (1980) offers five investigative guidelines: simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, permissibility, and frequently recurring activities. Each of these guidelines was utilized in this study.

- 1) Simplicity: Spradley (1980) suggests that social situations with the least amount

of complexity are the preferred starting point for any qualitative research study, especially for novice ethnographers. From simple social settings, the study can branch out to include more complex clusters and networks of social dynamics. For the purpose of bringing simplicity to this study, the research was restrained to a small, self-contained, residential campus where locations for student activities were in close proximity and often in small meeting places so as not to involve large populations of students at the same time.

2) Accessibility: Spradley (1980) argues that the greater the accessibility of a social situation, the better the opportunities for observing cultural dynamics. Accessibility for this study was not difficult in that I was employed at the institution under study as a residence hall director, having regular and consistent contact with study participants (i.e., students).

3) Unobtrusiveness: In gaining accessibility, a researcher must also be aware of how much distraction he/she is causing within the social situation. While it is impossible to remain completely invisible in a social setting, a researcher must consider ways to be as unobtrusive as possible. By living among the students as a residence hall director and being very visible to students on a regular basis, my presence was more natural and less obtrusive than if I had been an external observer.

4) Permissibleness: To gain access without being obtrusive, it is important for a researcher to obtain permission for entry into the social setting. Spradley (1980) suggests that researchers find “free-entry” opportunities rather than “limited-entry” or “restricted-entry” situations. As an employee and residence director, I was privy to any occasion or setting on the campus that involved students. However, permission to proceed with the study was also obtained from both the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs offices as well as from the Human Research Review committee of Wheaton College.

5) Frequently recurring activities: In order to discover cultural values and rules for behavior, it is important to observe settings that display frequently recurring activities. For this study, living with the students and participating with them in

many campus activities allowed me to see many frequently recurring activities on campus.

Familiarity

A comment regarding familiarity is in order. Some would argue that objectivity and precision is lost when studying the institution of one's employment. A researcher may discover facets of the persons being studied that the researcher would prefer not to see (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, McCormack Steinmetz, 1991). Or a researcher may identify so closely with the study that significant variances become so familiar as to be ignored. "Insiders" may not receive the openness and relaxed honesty that respondents may accord an "outsider" (Crowson, 1987), or they may feel the pressure of producing an advocacy-oriented report. On the other hand, while it may be important for insiders to "transform their own immersion" (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988, p. 4), it is equally important for insiders to provide perspective and understanding to a cultural study (Kuh et al., 1991). Only insiders can comprehend the full extent of meaning portrayed through various campus activities and events.

Yet questions about insider objectivity raised important considerations for this study, and special attempts were made to "make the familiar strange" (Whitt, 1993). Measures were taken to insure a degree of objectivity to the study. For example, students within my residence hall jurisdiction were not utilized for this study. Additionally, Ely et al. (1991) found that one of the most effective means for establishing boundaries and defining when "close" is "too close" was to discuss these issues openly with a sympathetic colleague. For this reason, I periodically reviewed a sample of my observations and interpretations with peers both internal (colleagues and close friends) and external to Wheaton College (I protected the confidentiality of participants by removing or changing the names of respondents when sharing my results). In so doing, some of my own biases and unfair appraisals as well as oversights were brought to my attention.

Despite these necessary precautions, it must be recognized that complete objectivity is never possible for any study. Masland (1985) asserts that "culture is implicit and we are all embedded in our own cultures" (p. 160). All research is therefore heavily value-laden

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consequently, every attempt was made to state my assumptions and biases up front and to remain reflexive about them. In this way, familiarity with the institution did not interfere with the credibility of my study. Indeed, there were some real advantages to having an “insider” perspective. I had only minimal acclimatization to different settings which allowed for more socialization time with students (Tierney, 1988). Moreover, my ability to interpret institution- specific behaviors increased my sensitivity to numerous cultural-specific meanings.

Participant Selection

Currently-enrolled Wheaton College students comprised the sampling base for this study. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to select participants. Purposive sampling ensured that a variety of types of subjects were included (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), thereby optimizing the information return for the amount of time and energy invested in the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The following minimal purposive sampling criteria were established for the selection of student respondents:

- 1) Status: Students had to be enrolled full-time at Wheaton College.
- 2) Residential: Students were selected who resided in on-campus or off-campus college housing.
- 3) Gender: An equal distribution of male and female students were interviewed.
- 4) Age: Wheaton College’s enrollment consists of almost exclusively traditional age students. Thus students selected for interviews ranged in age from 18 to 24. Initial stages of the interviews included an equal distribution of under- and upper-class students. However, because upper-class students were more familiar with the student and institutional cultures, their interviews were more informative and more frequently consulted during later stages of the interviews.
- 5) Ethnicity: Samples of students were selected from most minority groups represented on campus. Specifically, African-American, Asian-American, and Latino-American students were interviewed.
- 6) Christian Background: Students from both Christian and non-Christian family backgrounds were involved in this study.

7) Involvement: Students involved and uninvolved in formal extra-curricular activities participated in the study.

8) Major: Attention was given to selecting student samples from a broad range of academic majors.

For the initial stages of sampling, key student informants who were particularly knowledgeable of Wheaton's student culture were purposively selected. These key informants were identified by myself and various resident hall assistants. Resident assistants were asked to nominate students from underclass halls, upper-class halls, and acquaintances who lived off-campus. These results were collated for frequently reoccurring student nominations. In addition, I obtained a student leader list from the Student Activities Office and selected a few campus leaders who, because of their position, had a general awareness of many different students and student groups on campus.

After initial selection, snowball sampling was used to select additional study participants. After each interview, participants were asked to recommend 2 or 3 students whose perspectives were similar to their own and 2 or 3 students whose perspectives differed from their own. In this way, attempts were made to gather information from as many different perspectives as possible (Miles & Huberman, 1984). After each set of 10 interviews, names of students nominated were collated according to those most frequently mentioned who fulfilled the established sampling criteria (e.g. gender, ethnicity, class status, involvements, etc.). This process was repeated throughout the entire interview process.

Data Collection Procedures

Gaining Access

Official access to conduct research on Wheaton's campus was requested from the Academic Affairs office, the Student Affairs office, and the Human Research Review committee of Wheaton College prior to implementation of the study. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) indicate, however, permission to conduct a study involves much more than obtaining an official blessing. It also involves laying the groundwork for good rapport with those to whom the study will be directed. For this study, gaining access with students

was crucial. With this in mind, the following measures were taken to assist in this process.

- 1) A letter stating the purposes and design of the study was sent to participants before being personally contacted for an interview (see Appendix A).
- 2) Resident Assistants were utilized as reference and initial entry persons to develop rapport with study participants.
- 3) Each interview began with casual discourse and a full explanation of the study in order to help students feel comfortable and open during the interview.

Methods of Data Collection

Schein (1985) has emphasized the importance of “triangulation” in any attempt to learn about the culture of an organization. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data collection techniques, such as interviewing, document analysis, and participant observation, along with multiple sources of information, including students, faculty, staff and documents, to obtain as complex and accurate a picture of the culture as possible (Whitt, 1991). Triangulation is based on the assumption that somehow the weaknesses embedded within each single method will be compensated for by the strengths of the others (Jick, 1979). The following is a general description of the primary data sources and collection procedures incorporated in this study.

Interviews. An interview is a “purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more, that is directed by one in order to get information from the other. . . . [it] is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 96). Interviewing was the primary means of data collection for this study because interviews were judged to be the most effective means of gathering data on beliefs, attitudes, and values (Gordon, 1975). A variety of formats, such as individual interviews (both formal and informal) and focus groups, were conducted in order to elicit as many perspectives about the culture from as many different people as possible. On average, each interview lasted between one and one and one-half hours. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Transcriptions of interviews were included in a research log along with all methodological and analytical observations recorded during the

study.

Individual interviews occurred throughout the research process and were used both to discover aspects of culture and to address particular topics needing clarification or further investigation. In the beginning, interviews were more exploratory and open-ended, but as my findings and interpretations developed, later interviews became more structured with more specific questions. Although an initial set of broad questions was formulated to guide initial interviews (see Appendix B), I attempted to maintain flexibility and openness to new sources of information as they arose, subsequently modifying some as the study progressed. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note, “[qualitative] research design should be a reflexive process operating throughout every stage of a project” (p. 28). Individual interviews were conducted until a clear point of analytical saturation had been reached - - a point at which noteworthy data are redundant. For this study that saturation point occurred after 40 individual interviews had been conducted.

Focus groups are discussion groups that meet only once and concentrate upon a specific topic (Kuh et al., 1991; McMillin, 1989). For this study, focus groups were conducted around particular subcultures identified in the study. Consequently, the focus groups were assembled later in the study as subcultures became more clearly specified. Four focus groups (consisting of between five and seven participants per group) were conducted, each between sixty and one hundred twenty minutes in length. The four groups included the World Christian Fellowship cabinet, members of the football team, a campus musical band, and the William Osborne Society cabinet. During these interviews, particulars about each subculture were discussed, and participants had a chance to give feedback on preliminary interpretations and conclusions.

Document Analysis. Document analysis was also utilized in the study. Various documents (see below) were analyzed for the purposes of obtaining information, gaining impressions, and generating interview questions regarding both student and institutional cultures (Dobbert, 1984).

For the purpose of developing an understanding of student culture at Wheaton college, the following documents were consulted and analyzed:

1) Campus Publications: The student newspaper (The Wheaton Record) and other student generated publications were consulted on a weekly basis for significant concerns, attitudes, beliefs, and values of students. Attention was also given to statements and opinions posted upon a student “forum wall” in the Student Center.

2) Resident Assistants’ Journals: In fulfillment of requirements for the resident assistant training course (Psychology 333 - - Fall semester), resident assistants were given various options for small writing assignments. Of these options, one involved a written account of the student culture(s) on resident assistants’ individual floors (see Appendix C). These accounts included:

a) A description of student life at Wheaton College as perceived by resident assistants with residents on their floors. These descriptions address topics such as prevailing attitudes and beliefs among students (what they think students think is important), how students spend their time (engaged in what activities), how students interact with one another, and where they hang-out.

b) An identification by the resident assistants of various “subgroups” or “sub-communities” on their floor or in their residence hall. Resident assistants were asked to describe these sub-communities by their key features - - such as type of students who belong to each, where these subgroups hang out, what these subgroups do together, what’s important to them (in terms of attitudes and beliefs).

c) A reflection on the extent to which the resident assistants see the Evangelical Christian mission of the college reflected in these student sub-communities and how this mission is expressed in each.

Time was allotted in the Fall training course for a thorough description of the assignment and for preliminary training regarding the specifics of cultural analysis. Resident assistants were notified that their responses might be used for a dissertation research project. They were assured that any responses would be held confidential and completely anonymous for any reporting. Resident assistants were provided with other writing options, so documents were submitted with informed

consent. The documents attained from this exercise were analyzed for themes and used to generate research questions for additional interviews.

3) Student Reflection Papers: In coordination with the requirements for a *Freshmen Experience Course*, approximately 30-40 freshmen students (two different *Freshmen Experience* small groups) were asked to complete a 2-3 page personal reflection paper (see Appendix D). This paper involved two parts. The first part was a description of their interpretation of the Evangelical Christian ethos of Wheaton College. The second part was an analytical description of how they experience this Evangelical Christian ethos in their daily lives at Wheaton College. These documents were also used in this study to analyze themes and generate research questions for additional interviews. Even though required for a class assignment, students were assured in writing that all information gathered from these documents would be held confidential and completely anonymous for any reporting. Students were also given the option to not have their responses included as part of any research. Thus documents were obtained with informed consent by students.

Other documents were consulted to develop a fuller understanding of Wheaton's institutional culture. According to Kuh et al. (1991), the following documents were identified as particularly useful in defining the mission and culture of an institution:

- 1) student, faculty, or staff handbooks;
- 2) handbooks for policy and procedures;
- 3) promotional pamphlets such as admissions view books or student and organization recruitment brochures;
- 4) institutional mission and goal statements; and
- 5) institutional histories.

These documents, as well as others that describe the mission, values, and beliefs of Wheaton College as an Evangelical Christian college, were consulted and analyzed in the study in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the college's student and "official" cultures.

Participant Observation. Although not extensive, some time was spent in the field observing student behavior and activities. As an employee of the institution and co-resident with students in a residence hall, I had only to walk out my front door to be involved in participant observation of students. However, concerted efforts were made at specific times to observe student behavior carefully and journal my observations. In particular, I observed student activities associated with the four subculture groups identified in the study. Thus, I attended a few World Christian Fellowship Sunday evening services, I watched a complete football team practice as well as a weight-lifting session, I visited a few campus band concerts, and I attended a William Osborne Society function.

Data Recording

A large quantity of data were produced from these various research methods and sources. For this reason, a research log was maintained as a repository for all data information. Ely et al. (1991) encourage that as much as possible, logs should consist of a chronological record of what is learned and how it is learned throughout the study. The log, in effect, becomes the site where all data are recorded. It serves as the source for all analysis and generation of meanings; consequently, detail is important. As much as possible, all sources of information (e.g., interview transcripts; RA journal entries, student reflection papers, and other documentary materials; analytical memos; methodological memos; emergent themes) were included in the log. Numbering of lines was used as a means for organizing the material in the log (especially the interview transcripts), and space was left in the margins for later notes and comments (Ely et al.). As much as possible I tried to maintain the personal discipline of writing frequently so as not to forget what was considered or learned during the ongoing research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ely et al. (1991) caution that ethical considerations play a role in every step of qualitative research - - from how data are collected and analyzed to how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked reflexively throughout the research process. Of

particular concern in this study was the dual role that I assumed as a residence director and researcher. As residence director, I was obligated to report any student violations of ethical conduct and/or school policies. As a researcher, I needed to promise confidentiality to participants within the study. These differences led to occasional conflicts of interest. To alleviate some of these concerns, the following measures were implemented in the study:

- 1) Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.
- 2) Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants. The reporting of results was limited to the student's gender and class/year in school.
- 3) Every measure was taken to ensure confidentiality to participants. However, participants were informed that exceptions for confidentiality would be made for occasions when the researcher suspected the respondent of potentially bringing harm to others or to oneself.
- 4) Open and frank disclosure of the researcher's "dual role" was communicated to all study participants. These individuals were informed that the information obtained during interviews would be used only for dissertation research purposes. In addition, student participants were told that this research was being conducted first and foremost to identify and describe the student culture at Wheaton College, not to evaluate individual students or groups per se.

Data Analysis Procedures

A phenomenological approach to inquiry acknowledges the "position" of the researcher as much as the "position" of those being researched. For this study, my perceptions were used at the beginning of the analysis as a "conceptual entree - - a beginning logic, however simple or obvious, for linking datum to datum, for making initial sense out of what would otherwise be disparate bits of information" (Neumann & Bensimon, 1990, p. 681). However, these perceptions or understandings were used as points of departure - - not referent points - - in my analysis (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993).

Throughout the duration of the study my analysis followed a modified version of

the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, I constantly compared documents and interview transcripts to discern patterns or emerging themes which described and explained the material under consideration. These themes were recorded in my analytic memos which in turn helped to refine my research questions and direct further inquiry. "Data collection and processing, research implementation and research design, description and explanation - - all occur simultaneously in a back-and-forth process of progressive understanding" (Crowson, 1987, p. 41). Analysis in the field was always ongoing with data collection.

Eventually, from constant comparison of themes and observations, coding categories for the data emerged. There are many different types of coding categories suggested in the literature for qualitative studies. In their classic study of medical students, Becker et al. (1961) analyzed their data according to "incidents" and "perspectives." Ely et al. (1991) speak of "thinking units" which can be used to categorize the material. However, some researchers contend that analytic schemes can only be created from one's own individual data. Thus, for this study the coding categories were generated from the data as "analytical themes" for analysis. This coding of "analytical themes" evolved through a process of "stages" or "waves" of analysis.

For the first "wave" of analysis, all interview transcripts and documents were read in their entirety. During the reading, highlighter pens were used to highlight or underline noteworthy statements. Different colored pens were used to categorize different statements as they related to one of the three primary research questions (yellow for general student culture traits, blue for student subcultures, and green for interaction with official culture). Statements which related to more than one research question were underlined accordingly. In addition, analytical themes were listed on a separate sheet of paper as they were deciphered from the reading. These analytical themes corresponded with statements made in the transcripts or documents and were identified according to the numbering of lines on each transcript (analytical themes from documents were only identified according to page number). For each interview transcript, a separate sheet of paper was used as an analytical memo page and recorded general student culture themes on one side and student subculture themes on the other side (themes relating to the interaction with official culture were

identified during a later stage of analysis).

A second “wave” of analysis involved a review of these analytical memos. Separate coding sheets were formulated with room to list all significant analytical themes that emerged from the data and from the analytical memos. Corresponding to each significant analytical theme was a list of numbered references identified within the analytical memos. Analytical themes receiving a large number of references were arranged as major coding categories. Analytical themes receiving minimal references from the analytical memos were either discarded or incorporated into a larger coding category. The end product from this second “wave” of analysis was two separate coding sheets (for general culture and subcultures) listing the major analytical themes for the study. These coding sheets were utilized in later interviews and in focus group interviews to receive feedback from participants on my initial observations and interpretations.

The third “wave” of analysis involved the writing stage. After the coding sheets with major analytical themes were developed, further analysis and synthesis was needed in order to report the results. Thematic categories listed on the coding sheets were analyzed for even broader, more comprehensive descriptive categories. Thus, for general student culture, a framework was developed for identifying how students related to four basic areas of the college experience - - religious life, academic life, social life, and the life of activities. Likewise, student subcultures were grouped according to four major types of subcultures - - Christian service, college life, counterculture, and marginalized. These classifications of the data became the basis for the final reporting of results.

Trustworthiness of the Findings

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the quest to “make the research project credible, produce results that can be trusted, and establish findings that are . . . worth paying attention to” (Ely et al., 1991, p. 157). Trustworthiness is the qualitative equivalent of validity and reliability in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that neither term (validity and reliability) is really appropriate for qualitative research since each is grounded in a positivistic assumption that a single, objectively identifiable reality or generalizable truth exists. In contrast, a phenomenological or naturalistic approach to

inquiry recognizes multiple constructed realities from which a researcher seeks *verstehen* (understanding), not objective truth (Lincoln & Guba). This approach does not, however, disregard concerns for careful, well-designed research. Consequently, this study followed some of the suggestions offered by Lincoln and Guba for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study's findings. These included attention to the study's credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was ensured through the use of rigorous methods of data collection. The following efforts were implemented in the study:

Prolonged engagement. The study began in January, 1996 (devoting approximately 10-15 hours per week) and continued until analytical saturation had been met in the Spring of 1997.

Persistent observation. I was very attentive to those elements of the study which provided the most salient data.

Triangulation. The study included multiple data sources (purposive sample of students representing different backgrounds, classes, genders, and ethnic groups), multiple cases (interviewing students in different settings or times of the year), and multiple data collection methods (individual interviews, focus group interviews, writing exercises, participant observation and document reviews) for the purpose of recognizing convergence (preponderance of evidence) as well as contradictions/counter-patterns (negative evidence) among the emerging themes developed from the data.

Transferability

While generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, this study was "thick" in its descriptive detail, thereby providing others with a rich understanding of a particular culture which may provide relevant insights into their own. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that it is "*not* the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on

the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). Accordingly, this study provided extensive narrative with frequent quotation of sources and a full delineation of the physical, social, and interpersonal dynamics which influenced data and data collection.

Dependability and Confirmability

Reliability is difficult to establish in qualitative research because the researcher is the instrument. However, it is important for readers of the study to know that the data collection procedures followed are “consistent, internally coherent, and ethically aboveboard” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Furthermore, to address issues of the study’s validity (confirmability), the reader should be confident that the findings are grounded in the data, logical in terms of the data, and acceptable (Lincoln & Guba). To ensure reliability and confirmability, the following methods were used in this study:

Member checks. Periodically throughout the course of my research I checked my observations and interpretations with students to obtain feedback and to increase the credibility of my findings. This was accomplished by recycling approximately half of the individual interview transcripts back to interviewees to check for accuracy. I also produced brief summary reports and coding sheets of my research findings (conforming to the strictest standards of anonymity) which were reviewed and discussed with student participants.

Peer checks. Periodically I reviewed my observations and interpretations with peers both internal (close friends employed at Wheaton) and external to Wheaton College. These checks allowed me to sharpen my findings, raise concerns which may have been overlooked, and improve the dependability of the study. I protected confidentiality by removing or changing the names of participants involved in the study when sharing my results.

Limitations of the Study

Culture is an elusive concept, and its impact upon a college environment is extremely complex and difficult to comprehend. For this reason, certain limitations are involved with virtually every study of student culture. This study had at least six

limitations:

- 1) Due to limited time, only a snapshot of student culture during one particular calendar year was provided.
- 2) With only one researcher, the study was limited in scope. Because culture is complex, a team approach to research is better suited for studies of culture (Whitt & Kuh, 1991). One researcher is not able to collect all the varieties of cultural data transpiring continuously on a college campus.
- 3) Because the study was a description of only one institution, generalizations to all Evangelical Christian institutions is limited.
- 4) The study was limited to an investigation of traditional-age, single, residential students and therefore is not an accurate reflection of all students (especially growing numbers of non-traditional age students) represented among Evangelical Christian institutions.
- 5) Because of time constraints and feasibility issues, the study did not incorporate as much participant observation as originally desired.
- 6) This study does not decipher the cultural differences of students before they came to Wheaton and what impact these may have had upon the formation of student cultures at the college.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study did generate a number of analytically rich insights into the student life and culture at Wheaton College. These insights are chronicled in chapters four, five, and six.

CHAPTER IV

WHEATON COLLEGE STUDENT CULTURE

It's hard to think about a general student culture because I don't think there really is a typical Wheaton college student. There are a lot of different groups.

- - Junior, Female

It's really hard to stereotype people, but I suppose behind every stereotype there is a kernel of truth.

- - Senior, Male

If anything would characterize current Wheaton College students, it would be their resistance to characterizations. They do not like to identify others (particularly their peers) according to labels. Raised in a heritage that commands above all else to "love God and love your neighbor," Wheaton students avoid stereotypes for fear of passing some kind of judgment upon an individual. Their reluctance to stereotype mirrors the sentiments of many other youth in America's highly individualistic society. Perhaps this reluctance is reflective of Douglas Coupland's (1991) now famous categorization of this generation of students as "Generation X" - - with the "X" representing the universal symbol for something unknown. To be sure, this generation of students is complex and multi-faceted, and to speak in generalities about any student culture is, indeed, risky business.

So what can be said of the student culture at Wheaton College? Are there traits which characterize the whole student body? Can we realistically speak of a dominant student culture? Any attempt to examine the "student body" as a unit of analysis is complicated by the number and variety of different student groups represented within the institution. There are different classes, majors, residence halls, floors, social groups, study groups, ministry groups, sports teams, clubs, and organizations. Making sense of this complexity is no easy task.

Over the past several years, several scholars have attempted to analyze large cohorts of student groups to document significant similarities and common trends by which to identify a dominant student culture. Their work is particularly informative here, for it helps to alleviate much of the perplexity inherent in studying student cultures. For instance, in his 1990 article, "Assessing Student Culture," George Kuh sought to make sense of student culture according to three different levels: (1) a national level; (2) an institutional level; and (3) and intra-institutional level. The notion of a dominant student culture is reflected in his first two levels (Kuh's third level addresses the subcultural level of student culture and will be the focus of chapter five).

According to Kuh's (1990) first level, a national level, similarities in student attitudes and expectations for higher education create an underlying ethos of what it means to be a college student. Despite differences in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational background, college students face the same basic challenges in the college environment, such as choosing a major, becoming acquainted with the campus environment, adjusting to people from different backgrounds, and learning how the institution works (Love et al., 1993). From these common tasks a sense of shared experience is developed among student cohorts which forms the framework for a dominant student culture.

Similarly, Becker (1963) suggests that by focusing on the experience of students itself, and not on their past backgrounds or future ambitions, one can recognize the basis for a dominant student culture. To a large degree, the experience of traditional age college students is much the same. They feel that:

the main thing they must do while in college is demonstrate, both to themselves and to others, that they have grown up successfully, that they are no longer kids but are now mature adults. They believe that they can demonstrate their maturity by being successful while they are in college (p. 18-19).

According to Becker, students define their accomplishments by doing well in three areas of college life. There is the obvious area of academic work - - courses, grades, and degrees. Then, they must feel comfortable making friends - - including learning how to manage their relations with members of one's own sex as well as with the opposite sex.

And they must attempt to do well in activities that demonstrate their ability to handle and interact with people and organizations. When students feel a sense of accomplishment in these areas, Becker argues, students often feel like they have successfully “grown up” and are able to think well of themselves as well as be thought well of by others (Becker, 1963). With shared goals and tasks among students, the dominant student culture essentially becomes the experience of being a college student.

Students are different, and all these differences may influence the choice of one's intimates on a campus, but they do not affect the basic notion that it is important to do well in academic work, organization activity, and relations of friendship and dating. Students of all kinds are equally concerned with such matters, believing them to be the areas in which demonstrated competence will attest one's successful achievement of maturity. It is in this sense that we may think of the campus as having one student culture, a culture which dominates student thinking and influences the direction of their activity while in school (p. 25).

It would be overly simplistic, however, to conclude that the dominant student culture is formed only by those similar tasks that students face together; to be sure, the generational characteristics that students bring with them to college also play a defining role. Howe and Strauss (1991), for instance, speak of a “peer personality” that characterizes a cohesive “generation” of students. This generational persona is “recognized and determined by (1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation” (p. 64). In other words, by living through a similar period of time and events, a “generation” develops shared perspectives about things such as family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle, and the future. This is not to suggest that all beliefs and behaviors of a generation are uniformly represented across all members. But there is a sense in which even those who differ from their peer norm are generally aware of their nonconformity (Howe and Strauss, 1993). Accordingly, then, to think about a dominant student culture on a national level requires some consideration of both the common tasks students confront in college as well as the common generational views and experiences they bring with them to campus.

Kuh's (1990) second level for analyzing a dominant student culture is to consider institutional distinctives. Just as institutional cultures are unique, so, too, are the dominant student cultures within those institutions. Particularly at special mission institutions, such

as military academies, engineering and technical colleges, or institutions with a pervasive religious orientation, the students as a cohort may have distinctive characteristics - - both in terms of what they bring with them to college and what they set out to do with their college experience. Newcomb and Wilson (1966) pointed out that in special mission institutions, the students' selection of college and the college's selection of students tends to reduce the variance of cultural factors that exist within the student body. Thus, at an institution such as Wheaton College - - which has a distinctive Evangelical Christian mission - - it is likely that the students will share relatively homogeneous attitudes and beliefs regarding Christianity that will influence the more salient aspects of the dominant student culture.

This chapter will discuss the dominant student culture at Wheaton College by investigating both national and institutional levels of student culture. Specifically, attention will be given to the three dominant "agendas" for college students as identified by Becker (1963), along with a fourth "agenda" regarding the distinctively religious focus of Wheaton College. The following discussion will highlight how students at Wheaton College encounter and make sense of four dimensions of student life at Wheaton: (1) religious life; (2) academic life; (3) social life; and (4) the life of activities. Central to each will be an analysis of how students at Wheaton College reflect generational trends of popular American youth culture along with distinctively Christian commitments as appropriated from the culture of Evangelical Christianity. This chapter, then offers a snapshot of the life of Wheaton's students while attempting to understand from their perspective what the "Wheaton experience" is all about.

The Religious Life

The bell chimes, the people stand, and a silence descends upon the clamor of students rushing to find their designated seats. Chapel has begun. Once a staple for all institutions of higher education, chapel is now only a rare commodity on college and university campuses. But at Wheaton College, chapel is a central focus for the spiritual development of students. Spread out on three days of the week and scheduled in the late morning, it is a distinctive ritual in a Wheaton student's academic day and week. It intends to "provide worship opportunities in the context of building community and integrating

faith and learning” (Inform: Bulletin of Wheaton College, 1996, p. 14). For the campus community, it stands as perhaps the most significant artifact of the institution’s Christian religious commitment and educational intentions. Chapel at Wheaton College is taken seriously. On the first chapel and opening convocation of the new school year, the President, delivering the opening address, reminds the students to bring their Bibles to chapel. Exposition of God’s Word, an essential of Evangelical doctrine, is his clarion call. He’s there to do business, and the expectation is that students will too.

As the crowd of approximately 2,300 students and staff quietly take their seats, one is struck by the magnitude of this accomplishment. Here in one building, during a specifically designated time, a large majority of the campus population is gathered. Of course, chapel for all students is mandatory. They are allowed nine chapel skips each semester and know that, with assigned seating and dutiful “chapel checkers” who record each miss, they cannot avoid the requirement, at least not without probation and possible dismissal from the institution.

Yet one could get the impression that even without this stipulation, the majority of students would still come. Many look forward to chapel as a significant part of their day. One student comments, “chapel is the highlight of my day. When I am stressed out from all my classes and problems with friends, I can come to chapel and be reminded of God’s presence in my life.” And even though every student may not be there out of his or her own volition, there is a sense that all choose to come to chapel based upon their matriculation at this institution. According to data from UCLA’s Higher Educational Research Institute (Astin, Korn, Mahoney & Sax, 1995), Wheaton College was the first college of choice for 93% of its entering freshmen. And students enroll knowing that chapel will be a required part of their Wheaton College experience.

Perhaps even more significant than their attendance is the degree of respect students demonstrate for chapel. The campus chaplain, restricted by the time requirements for the campus radio station broadcast, is compelled to bring the crowd to order at the sounding of the bells. An initial prayer or Bible reading is a sign - - and even tactic - - for the students to quiet their minds, hearts, and especially their mouths before God. In a matter of seconds, virtual silence fills the auditorium, signifying student reverence (at least

externally) for the religious commitments and the purposes of chapel.

However, an occasional cackle or outburst from a student or students breaks the silence with unusual clarity for an auditorium so large and serves as an auditory reminder that students are still the focus of chapel and that they still have a degree of power. Although incredibly responsive to the stipulations of administrative prerogatives, students still choose to make of chapel what they want to make of it. For it isn't long into the chapel service before homework assignments, class readings, or letters from friends begin appearing on the laps of some student participants. Worship has not begun for them, and their response of ambivalence is quite different from the attentive note-taking of other students in the same auditorium. Indeed, the experience of chapel is reflective of the different responses students have of the religious expectations surrounding Wheaton College.

One Lord, Different Expressions of Faith: Student Responses to the Religious Life

Many Wheaton students are passionate about their faith, and eagerly participate in religious activities. Student led groups related to religious activities include Discipleship Small Groups (DSG's), World Christian Fellowship (WCF), Christian Service Council (CSC), and various summer ministry teams (National City Ministries - NCM; Student Missionary Project - SMP; Youth Hostel Ministry - YHM). These organized activities exist alongside numerous student-generated Bible studies, worship times, prayer meetings, ministry teams, and discussion groups. For example, each of the underclass residence halls has, in addition to a Hall Council, a Spiritual Life Committee consisting of student leaders responsible for the spiritual growth of students. And student organizations, such as Koinonia (a fellowship of Asian students), offer their own established times for singing, prayer, and worship. The religious life of students is pervasive on Wheaton's campus, and is certainly a central focus of the dominant student culture.

Some students are not always eager to participate in the religious life of Wheaton, and may demonstrate indifference or even hostility to many who are.² That said, it is nearly

² A discussion of some student subcultures in chapter five will reflect this range of responses.

impossible for students to participate in student life without responding in some way to Wheaton's Christian ethos. Even when students are not active in campus religious activities, they still interact with and struggle through religious issues in their lives. They may react against the cultural forms and norms of Evangelical Christianity, for instance, but they respond to Christianity nonetheless. During their time at Wheaton they may reject religion all together, but they at least deal with significant issues along the way. Indeed, a requirement for acceptance to the institution is a signed statement of faith from each individual student. And Christianity is a key reason why students choose Wheaton in the first place. Fully 86% of the entering freshmen class cited religious affiliation/orientation as their primary reason for selecting Wheaton College - - the highest ranked reason among a list of nineteen selections (Astin et al., 1995). While religious commitments and lifestyle choices may differ, the majority of students at least manifest one common, underlying value - - a love for Jesus Christ. One student, reflecting upon her college choice, commented:

I came to the conclusion that I wanted to go to a Christian college. For the past four years, I had been at a public school and I was familiar with the pressures that go along with being in this environment. I realized that at college, I did not want to have to deal with these pressures. I wanted to be able to concentrate on other things like my spiritual growth, not downfall. So I began to think about what I would deal with on a Christian campus. I would share at least one common interest with every student - - my love for Jesus Christ and my desire to serve Him. I was looking forward to the various ways I would be able to worship, through chapel and World Christian Fellowship. I anticipated the dozens of ministries offered to reach out to others. In general, I didn't feel student life would be all that different from a secular school, except that God would be involved. Sure, there aren't the same events at Wheaton that there might be at Northwestern (University), but we are still college students just like all the other college students. We want to have fun and enjoy our college careers. . . I have now been at Wheaton College for nine weeks and I must say it is a lot like I expected. Wheaton students are not all stereotypical Christian college students. We are all different but with one commonality: our love for Christ.

- - Freshman, Female

This "love for Christ" is an accepted and expected norm - - or what Schein (1985) would refer to as a perspective - - within the dominant student culture at Wheaton College. Not altogether surprising, the vast majority of Wheaton's students come from an Evangelical Christian heritage - - 98% identify themselves as born-again Christians (Astin

et al., 1995). Hence, most are often comfortable perpetuating this identity. Students speak of coming to Wheaton and feeling a “common bond of Christian unity.” Students assume that Christianity will be an important part of their Wheaton experience. As one senior female explained:

Growing in the Christian life is important to students. Overall students are interested in finding God’s will and finding how they can grow as Christians and in their academic knowledge of the Bible and how they live that out and how that moves them and how they feel about that. Most of them are interested in that. If they weren’t they wouldn’t be at a Christian college.

Another junior male added:

I feel like I have the same belief system as many, if not all. I want to say everybody’s a Christian here. That’s a neat thing that I’ve never had. So this was very noticeable to me right away that I could sit down and have a Christian conversation where everyone was on the same plane - - everybody knows all the Bible stories. . . Christianity is important to all, whether or not it’s as real to them.

This last student’s distinction between being “important” and being “real” is significant. What it says is that while most share some type of common religious commitment, all students may not respond to or enact this commitment in the same manner.

An analytical student made the distinction in this way:

There may be two ways of looking at this - - what are the implicit values and what are the explicit values. I think explicitly it’s clear that everyone is spiritual. There’s a definite common focus. If anyone were to ask you, “what is your main goal in life,” you would probably give a spiritual answer. But of course, just as is true with any other place, that’s not necessarily going to be true implicitly. To varying degrees, we can place other things above God. There’s a real pressure for academic success. The value of doing well academically is stressed. If I were to suggest to someone to take Sunday off as part of a biblical norm, they would probably say, “you just don’t do that. I have to study.” So implicitly, whether or not my perspective is right, they don’t look at that, they just say I have academics to do, so you can see the higher value. Likewise you often see people staying up late on Saturday night and then skip church. These are trite examples but give a flavor of the difference between explicit and implicit values of students.

- - Senior, Male

Along with different values, students may also possess different religious beliefs. These beliefs, however, are still formulated within a Christian framework. As the following student experienced, many students accept and even appreciate the diversity of

religious perspectives represented among fellow Christian students, but also maintain some sense of a collective belief in Christianity.

When I came here, I expected pretty much heaven. I expected to come here and to have my faith be an issue to the point where we all agreed on it, but also have it almost be a non-issue to the point that we wouldn't have to worry about it. And we would just be able to do everything else and have a great time doing it because we didn't have to worry about this one important thing. I think that that was something that was really blown out of the water. My faith was a paramount issue because it was my faith - - and there were commonalities but also a lot of differences. We brought a lot of things together, and starting my freshman year I began to clash or join, depending on who the person was. I found out that we all believe in this one God, but there's a lot of different ways that we've all had to look at it. It's all the same God, but there's a lot of different perspectives on him. At first, that was scary to me because I didn't want that. I wanted heaven. But then it became an enriching experience for me.

- - Junior, Male

Hence, even though students are aware of differences among their peers regarding religious values and beliefs, there is still the realization - - and even appreciation - - of a common foundation upon which the dominant student culture depends. The outcome is a student population that takes many of their life decisions very seriously. They choose to dialogue with other students about such esoteric topics as "the meaning of life" or "the mysteries of life after death." They strive for some sense of purpose to their life and look for answers to perplexing problems. Speaking to this point, a senior male made the following observation:

What I've noticed, in say my experience at Northern Illinois and being out in the quote 'real world,' is that people just aren't concerned about matters religious, spiritual, and ultimately meaningful. But that's one thing generally important to Wheaton students - - somehow reacting to the Christian question or religious question, which most people in the world or in America are definitely not concerned with If you were at a secular university, these things are just not issues. There's no public dialogue about what's really good, what's a good person, what kind of person do I want to be, what's our responsibility to others. Usually quite often the answer to these sorts of questions are grounded in religion. If you're in a secular environment where religion is thought of as weird, it's difficult to discuss openly.

At Wheaton, open discussions about religion are not thought of as weird. While not necessarily frequent, it is not unusual to walk through the student center and hear heated conversations about such issues as predestination and free will of humans, or about

the chapel message and speaker for the day. A Christian commitment is accepted as normal and is encouraged as much through the student culture as the institutional culture. Outsiders and insiders alike can see its significance among students.

In regard to relationship with God, two of my friends came to visit me from USC and they were plopped into the college life here and they were amazed about how people were constantly talking about the things of God and the desire to be more like Him - emphasizing His character and His good work in our lives. You can't be a part of this campus without knowing that he is real to us and that we desire to grow in our relationship with Him. . . . There's a real openness to spiritual things on this campus. You can find people sitting in the quad praying, or listening to people share what is happening with them in classes.

- - Senior, Female

An awareness of God, therefore, greatly impacts the dominant student culture of Wheaton College. Although students may respond to many of the expectations differently, there is a general assumption that Christianity should affect the lives of students. While not always precisely articulated, Wheaton students do have a certain "look" about them which is connected to their religious commitments and is reinforced through the student culture. Students do strive, in one way or another, to feel as though they have matured religiously. Thus, basic Christian assumptions generally impact the attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs of students - - in short, their culture. Wheaton students (particularly students oriented toward Christian service) incorporate and enact the Christian ethos on campus in several ways, although two of the more noticeable distinctions are found within an emphasis on religious activities and personal morality.

Student Enactment of Religious Life: An Emphasis on Religious Activities and Personal Morality

In comparison to other college students, the religious activities of Wheaton students are very prevalent. In addition to required chapel, many students choose to attend weekly church services (primarily on Sunday) and get involved with any number of ministry opportunities, on or off campus. The expectation for this is reflected in the following student's comments:

I do think that for most students, their Christianity is important to them, otherwise they wouldn't be here. I think most students go to church, and

most students are involved in ministry. I'd say about 50% of the students are involved pretty regularly in ministry. I know of a lot of people involved in Christian Service Council ministries, but I know some others are also involved in their churches - - at least on a weekly basis. I've heard church attendance is up from last year, especially after the revival. I would guess around 80% of the students go to church on Sundays.

- - Junior, Female

Students also give special credence to some of the basic spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer. Daily devotions are placed on a priority list for many (although not all) of the students. Devotions typically consist of some type of reading (from the Bible or devotional book) and a time of prayer. More creative students or students attempting to alleviate "ruts" or boredom will choose to sing, meditate, or alternate locations for their devotional "quiet time." In keeping with Evangelical customs, most students also pray before their meals, giving thanks to God for their food and His provision.

Evangelical customs are also extended through one of the most significant visible artifacts: language. Students use many words and phrases which have been coined in their churches and Christian heritage. As one student explained:

You can see it by the lingo we use - - like "sanctification, blessing, saying a blessing, pray for you, keep you in my prayers" - - just different words or phrases that are hilarious. And you can tell, because like we'll just be chatting, and then as soon as some comment comes around, we'll be back in this other language that just isn't characteristic of what we use every day. It kind of shows that it is a culture, and we have our own language.

- - Sophomore, Female

Students not accustomed to some of these artifacts relate a sense of "culture shock" to Wheaton's environment. One student described his initial unease at Wheaton College like this:

Since I had always been in public schools, I was a little leery. I remember when I got here, I didn't really say much. I was just kind of existing here. I felt like everybody was real perfect and real Christian. I almost wondered if these people had ever done anything wrong. Have these people ever been to a party? Do they actually know what goes on in the world? For about the first semester, it was like that, until I started meeting friends and talking about different stuff and realizing that this or that guy is normal. Another thing that really caught me off guard when I came here is that everybody prayed before their meal - - every meal. At home I just start eating. I don't think one second about praying. We'd pray if we all sat down together at a meal, but other than that, not much. And I remember everybody got dressed up to go to church. At home, I wore jeans and a T-shirt, mostly because of the weather, but also because that's the style. I remember the

first Sunday lunch thinking, “what’s going on here, people don’t look like this through the week.” So there were some shocks. Maybe so many Christians in one place just shocked me. And they’d always talk about Young Life or some other youth group thing, and I’d never heard of any of it. I’d just be so confused.

- - Senior, Male

The religious commitment of Wheaton students is also reflected through an emphasis on personal morality. The Christian religion calls for obedience to Biblical norms, especially as exemplified through Christ himself. How a person lives and what choices they make are viewed as indicators of one’s commitment and response to God’s love. These are the “fruits of the Spirit.” In keeping with much of their Evangelical religious tenets, most Wheaton students give special attention to personal character traits and lifestyle decisions. The majority of students struggle with what it means to be a person of integrity (especially as related to the college’s Statement of Responsibilities³). Most strive to be disciplined, to be mature, and especially to be loving. They possess a fairly serious outlook on life and on their own personal responsibility. Much of this is reflected in their observations about other Wheaton students.

I expected students to be Christian and therefore basically good people - - the implications being very widespread. Their mouths would be cleaner, their attitudes would be a lot friendlier than what you would find at a public school. I think these were affirmed. People at Wheaton for the most part are good people and desire the best for themselves and for other people. And I think there is kind of a “good person” mentality around here. And it’s not because people are just faking it.

- - Junior, Male

Christian faith is kind of the underlying thing of importance. The connection to relationships is that core set of beliefs in Christianity. . . . An outsider would be able to see this through individual interaction with students. The students would be able to demonstrate the fruit of the spirit. I think for the most part this is really true. You can talk to students here and most of them are kind and caring and more willing to talk with a stranger that comes in from the outside. They tend to be interested in visitors. Guys

³ The Statement of Responsibilities (see Appendix E) is a statement regarding community responsibilities for cultivating a campus atmosphere in which moral and spiritual growth can be fostered. The statement, commonly referred to as “the Pledge,” is composed of three sections: Biblical principles, Christian lifestyle commitments, and college concerns regarding a Christian learning environment. Students, by virtue of their enrollment at the college, agree to accept the responsibilities of membership in the college community. Most student attention regarding “the Pledge” is given to the prohibitions listed as college concerns for gambling, most forms of social dancing, and the use of tobacco and/or alcoholic beverages.

on my floor get excited about Connectors (prospective students) coming. They're just really hospitable. There's a degree of caring and kind of nurturing in our community that I think is particular to a Christian institution. Also I think people would observe the Christian faith just by some of the things students are doing - - the way they spend their time in small groups, or mentoring, or a lot of ministries. I think our community is interested in the well-being of it's parts. On a large scale, that's difficult to pull off. If there is a freshman in Fischer Hall that's suicidal, the guys over in Terrace Apartments probably really don't care. But immediately around that student, like the people on his floor or the people in the dorm, they're probably really concerned about him - - praying for him, trying to help him out however they can. There just seems to be an atmosphere of what Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians about the different parts of the body and how it should maintain itself and care for itself. So I say nurturing just in the sense of coming alongside some of the broken parts and encouraging the people around them to continue on living for Christ. I see that happening more than the negative aspects. I see more nurturing than I see tearing down.

- - Junior, Male

Another student expressed this "care for others" as a more outward look of Wheaton students upon a "bigger vision" than just themselves.

Relationship with Christ is very important. An outsider would see it in lifestyles. While there's elements of worldliness, there's less self-absorption and students are less self-centered than the average kid at a secular school. It generates a sense of community. One of my brothers at school is in a fraternity - - a forced, contrived association and very individualistic. What struck me here when I visited is that most Wheaton students have a bigger vision than themselves and what they are going to do individually.

- - Junior, Male

Christian commitment in personal morality is reflected by what students won't do as much as by what they will do. There are moral and cultural prohibitions against certain types of "wrong" or "worldly" behavior. In addition to some of the biblical prescriptions against lying, stealing, and premarital sex, students also encounter some of the cultural stipulations related to such things as swearing, drinking, drug use, or even dancing. Even among the students who choose to ignore or disobey many of these prohibitions (discussed in chapter five), there is at least a realization that they are violating a norm. An occasional look of disapproval or verbal reminder from a peer offer plenty of incentive to prevent a student from "breaking the rules." Of course, awareness of these prohibitions is so pervasive within the student culture that self-monitoring will often be all that is needed to restrain a student. As the following student describes, these prohibitions "just kind of get

in your nerves” to the point that any violations would be unsettling to most.

I’ve spent some time at other schools with different friends, and you can just tell a difference. You can feel it in the air. By way of comparison, if you take students here who like to party and hit the bars and go downtown - - my freshman and sophomore years here I was into that, the underground at Wheaton. But as bad as those people are looked at here - - and I don’t know how remorseful all students are here when they do stuff like that, but I know when I would go out and do that, even while I was doing it, I would just feel bad and say, “why am I doing this?” Whereas when I go to some of those other schools and there would be a party, there was never a question of why people were doing it or if it was wrong. That wasn’t a consideration, it was just “let’s ham it up and have a party.” And you can tell in just talking to someone, when they’re dropping F-Bombs and just cussing. But you don’t hear that here. Once you’ve been here for a while, it just kind of gets in your nerves. I don’t think no matter how much a student here decides they just want to backslide and go crazy against God, the fact that they’ve met him and know who he is is such a commanding force that in comparison to other students at those other schools, it’s not the same. No matter how far students here want to run, he’s still standing right there. Whereas students who have never met God and don’t really want to or have a clue about him, they think nothing of what they do. They don’t need a purpose for what they do or a reason. They just do it because they want to. That’s the biggest difference I can see. Most of it is a moral difference.

- - Senior, Male

Because Wheaton students take many of the religious prohibitions seriously, their behaviors also reflect a more conservative lifestyle. Although they can and do have fun, compared to most college students their fun is usually tempered within certain parameters.

As a senior male explained:

Our Christianity is very important to us. How that manifests itself may come in different ways. Even though there’s a lot of pledge-breaking going on at this campus, it won’t be to the same degree as what might happen at other schools. And I hate to say that’s what defines Wheaton students as this lifestyle of temperance or of taking yourself seriously, but then again you don’t want to trash your body. So we have this ethos that we’ve been brought up with that this body is not ours and this life is not ours. I think we all agree with that. Sure we may say that we can still drink and “peshaw” to the pledge, but you’re not going to have a hedonist on this campus. You’re not going to have someone that says “screw the whole thing.” The thing that’s going to visibly stand out is this temperance - - there’s something about Christianity that everyone tries to identify with.

Overall, Wheaton students display a “different atmosphere” in their personal morality and in their participation in religious activities. These differences reflect a commitment - - in varying degrees - - to Evangelical Christian assumptions. They

demonstrate that for the majority of Wheaton students, faith is important, and that faith must be demonstrated through actions. It is what many students refer to as “being real with one’s faith,” something that students find refreshing about fellow students. One student expressed the views of many of her peers on this point as follows:

I think with Christians - - and this I find encouraging - - is that the age of Christianity that this generation is coming upon is more of the, you know, “let’s listen to each other. Let’s get rid of this legalism, and turn only to God.” That’s encouraging - - getting rid of a lot of the junk that past generations have left - - all the guilt things over all us kids that have grown up under it. So I think that’s a good thing. Many are still in the conservative mode, but they’re also just more of the radical types like, “sure, I’ll drop everything and just go serve God. That’s no problem.” And they’ll do that, and I would believe that about many people here. I can respect that. There’s a level of faith here. Coming here I’m impressed with the level of real Christians. At least here they either are or they’re not. There aren’t too many of the “wishy-washy” types. It’s genuine, and I’ve found quite a few genuine Christians, and not Bible-bangers. . . . An outsider would probably see this by the directness of the person’s attention to them. There’s quite a few people here that you can tell they have a love for people, just in the way they address you. Also things like attending church or attending Christian functions, making it a priority in their lives to keep working on things. It’s pretty obvious to anyone who like comes to stay for a weekend. They would know whether or not the person they were staying with was devoted to what they believed in.

- - Freshman, Female

Student Enactment of Religious Life: Difficulties Incumbent with Religious Commitments

Even though “being real” with one’s faith is very important to Wheaton students, the pressure for commitment can be a double-edged sword. Students feel that they must demonstrate their religious maturity, so they strive very hard to look good. But they often confuse the ends for the means, the effect for the cause. Instead of perceiving their commitments as responses (effects) to a relationship with God, they often view these commitments as the source (cause) of their relationship with God. Thus, there is a tendency among some Wheaton students to focus upon performance rather than being. They can become driven by law rather than by grace. One student, recognizing this dilemma, offers a poignant corrective:

There’s a real focus on becoming spiritually mature. Those things are good if done as a means, as long as they’re a means of saying “we want God to be glorified.” But I think it becomes, “you must be spiritually mature to be satisfied.” So I think there’s almost an implicit idea that God won’t really

like you unless you do your devotions in the morning, unless you do service, unless you become spiritually mature, because there's such a push for doing all these things. And it's not being done in a way of saying "God loves you." Especially at a college like this, we need to hear the doctrine of grace a lot more, because we will very naturally fall into the mind-set, without even realizing it, that we set out to earn God's acceptance of us by doing good things. So because of the achievement orientation of the college in general, there's a real feeling of, "unless you do your devotions, unless you do your ministries, God's not going to be loving you quite as much."

- - Senior, Male

The result of this achievement orientation is a preoccupation with an image of "having it all together." Outward appearance becomes the basis for many value judgments. And students crave approval for their actions. To accomplish an objective of "spiritual success," many succumb to hypocritical actions. Students speak of "playing the game" or of "putting on masks" - - fervent attempts to hide or deny reality and provide an appearance that offers a sense of religious achievement or maturity. According to many Wheaton students interviewed, students on other types of institutional campuses most likely would not experience this same reality.

I think Wheaton students are different from secular students because Wheaton students put on a front more. If you go out drinking, you go out drinking. If you're sleeping with your girlfriend, so what? Wheaton students want to look like they're okay not only academically but spiritually. A lot of people want to look spiritually like they don't have any faults because that would mean I'm a bad Christian. It's hard to be vulnerable here, at least what I've heard in talking to friends at secular schools. Other people who have visited secular campuses say it's really refreshing because they see people at face value and sometimes they feel here they're not quite convinced of that.

- - Junior, Female

The assumption is often made within the student culture that all Christians should be involved in religious activities. Many students react against this expectation, but can attest to the pressure to get involved.

Some of the values and assumptions that significantly impact student life are the need to appear correct, spiritually on track, like you're doing ministry or service. I have sensed (and others I've talked to have, too) that there's a reluctance to rock the boat, or to be different, to admit failure, to admit that things aren't going too well in your life, that spiritually you're in a dry spot, especially with the spiritual side of things. A lot of things play into this - - chapel, summer ministries, College Post Office telegrams. During my freshman year I really wanted to be involved in some of those things - - especially if I really wanted to be doing the right things and appearing

correct to people. I felt I needed to be in Christian Service Council or go on a summer ministry. My sense is that a lot of people conform to that and are frustrated but don't voice it and that there's a group of people who are frustrated and don't conform but go the opposite direction. Then there's a middle group - - which is where I am - - frustrated by it but sees the historical reason with the Evangelical subculture that we came out of and sees the pros and cons and doesn't want to denigrate what's going on with the ministries and Christian Service Council groups.

- - Junior, Female

I can't say that I'm against students doing these ministries, but the expectation is what gets me. I feel like there's a zeal about this stuff, that if you do this stuff, you're boosting yourself up the ladder. So there's almost like a social prestige about it. There are whole chapels devoted to different ministries. I'm not against them, but I think it divides the students who can't do it - - that it puts assumptions on us that we don't care or something.

- - Senior, Male

Church attendance is yet another example of the cultural expectation at Wheaton to conform to Evangelical Christian norms. Students may be actively involved in local churches, but for many their involvement is nothing more than "going through the motions." They may be physically present while at the same time mentally absent. Some students don't even bother with physical presence, opting instead for a morning at "Bedside Baptist" or "Pillow Creek Church." However, some of these same students will dress in church clothes so that they aren't questioned about church attendance while eating lunch at the dining commons. Thus, conforming to an expected image often becomes more important than what is learned from the experience. As one student observed:

I don't get the feeling from Wheaton students that church really impacts students' thoughts. . . . I don't tend to hear them talk about church at all, even on Sundays. They go to church and then come back and it's time to get on with the rest of their lives. It doesn't seem to impact the way they think about things. In general I have to ask my roommates if they went to church, and usually they did, but you wouldn't hear anything about it.

- - Junior, Female

Even though many students may be involved in religious activities at Wheaton, then, it appears that they may be doing it simply to go through the motions. Because of the pressure to appear religious or Christian, students may strive to display outward actions which are safely within the boundaries of acceptable "Christian" behavior. An unwritten code of conduct develops from an emphasis on personal morality, and many students display tendencies of either conforming mindlessly to this code or, as other students

reported, taking the code too seriously. This latter response is perhaps even more troublesome than the former, since students place inordinate pressure on themselves to act a certain way in order to prove to themselves, to others, and even to God that they are being responsible with their religious commitments. With Christ as their example, they reach for perfection, but set themselves up for failure.

I think there's a degree of perfectionism. The ideal of what a Christian is to be is just so high. And I think there's a lot of misconceptions about you know, "if my faith is strong enough, then I wouldn't be feeling this" or whatever. Sophomore year I had a hard time because I had a very sweet roommate, but she just spiritualized everything - - "this must be God's will because this didn't happen this way." And it was all just so causal - - if I do "X" and "Y", then "Z" will happen. And I think that's why there are so many disorders among students, because they fit so many of the stereotypes of white middle class girls with perfectionistic tendencies.

- - Senior, Female

Students striving to achieve and mature do not like failure, and often resort to a "false front" to save embarrassment or defeat.

What's really important for students is living a Christ-like life. That's what it comes down to, and anything that can be construed as not doing that is titled "bad." And anything you're doing toward that goal is "good." Unfortunately, sometimes that will lead to students putting on a totally false front and creation of almost a double identity because they're too afraid to be vulnerable and admit that they're not living a Christ-like life and are struggling with this or that sin. And they think they can't say anything to anybody, because if they do, it's looked down upon like, "what's wrong with your relationship to God? That's what it comes down to, doesn't it?" But the value definitely is to live a life according to Jesus Christ and walk in his footsteps. That's central.

- - Senior, Male

This double identity has the potential to create a false illusion for students. Many students possess a drive to look "spiritual" - - to act as though they have their life together. But this pressure can be very difficult for some students to deal with effectively. A senior female, for example, emphasized that "there's a lot of pressure to be "super-Christian" or to pretend if you're not really sure about your faith. The students here give off an air of knowing a lot about the Bible, when in fact we found out that a lot of us just don't." Another senior female stated:

When I came in as a freshman, there was a real sense that everyone here was very spiritual - - not necessarily that everyone was, but there was a big pressure to be. I found the hardest thing for me coming in here was that

anything I said reflected on my spiritual life. I think there's a definite sense even now when I meet new people that you always have to sort of feel them out to know what you can say without being judged. I think students are always on the look-out for that. That creates a weird sort of pressure when trying to meet people.

Not surprisingly, this pressure to conform - - to maintain a "good, Christian image" - - frequently leads students to hide their wrongdoings or failures. One respondent underscored this consequence of Wheaton's "code of conduct" in this way:

I'd describe this school as an undercover state school. It has a lot of the same problems and same issues, but people hide it more here, so I think it's even more detrimental here. I know people sleep around, I know people do drugs, I know people drink, I know that they do everything that they've signed their name not to do. So I don't see that there's much different. It's just quieter here. And there is a larger number of students who don't engage in those, so that makes a difference. But there's enough students here that do that it's very similar. From what I see, it's very important to look good here - - to make sure everything appears to be okay. I don't think students are very honest about the realities of whatever, about what they really think or really feel about something. Partly I think that's just because you don't really have to here. You can maintain a certain thing without really working at it, and it's okay.

- - Sophomore, Female

In keeping with a perfectionistic standard, many students also hide personal difficulties because they feel they must deal with their problems themselves. They feel that to be honest about one's problems is to admit personal failure or to admit that somehow God does not have power to overcome their tribulation. So rather than risk criticism, they choose to put on a mask and hope that the problem gets better.

They keep it to themselves that they're having a hard time. That's a lot of the Wheaton attitude - - to keep it to yourself and deal with it on your own. They would never admit to that, but Christianity in general tends to put a mask on things. You have to say that God is taking care of everything and that they're fine. That's what people do here.

- - Freshman, Female

One resolution to hiding problems is to never have problems in the first place. Thus, most Wheaton students take a very conservative approach to lifestyle issues and try to avoid problems by maintaining the status quo. They exchange controversy, tension, and change for peace, order, and stability, and in doing so, conform even more to the "Evangelical Christian" image expected of them. Listen, for example, to how one student described this reality:

We're bred in these Christian homes that teach us not to be controversial. I definitely remember people in the church who would bring up issues and my parents would say, "oh, he's just a trouble-maker." Traditionalism and conservatism is equated with Godliness. Traditional, Evangelical Christians don't like change. And controversy is the stuff of challenge and change. I respect people who have thought about the issues and come out on the right side of the fence. But I don't respect people who don't think about the issues, and refuse to engage in discussion. That might characterize students, depending on the issue. I think there's a large percentage of students who have thought very little about issues of importance apart from the traditional, Biblical, Sunday School issues: sex, drugs, rock-and-roll, and abortion. Gosh, I'm sure glad that a lot of Wheaton professors engage students in the issue of feminism, because students here have no idea what feminism is all about.

- - Senior, Male

The challenge of putting on a false front, of playing a game, of hiding problems, of conforming to an expected image, is often very difficult for students to handle. Some are able to filter through the emphasis on an Evangelical Christian image and find genuine substance to their faith, even though they still "come out on the right side of the fence." Others react against what they see as hypocrisy in students and a perceived facade which advocates a "don't worry, be happy" attitude. Yet by becoming less inhibited about their lifestyle, they struggle to find a "spiritual niche," and often resort to a calloused or apathetic outlook on their religious experience. One can sense the frustration and agony in this student's voice as she tries to be genuine and at the same time find an identity within the Wheaton student culture:

There seems to be this false (and maybe it's not false, I've just never experienced it) sort of happiness in Christ. Everybody smiles at each other and everybody is fine. But there's just a sense of unreality to that. It just seems like, "but wait, you don't understand that people here are getting pregnant, there's homosexuals, people are struggling with drugs, they're struggling with lots of things, and yet everybody is happy." Wheaton guys aren't all nice, Wheaton guys rape girls. But Wheaton doesn't have any policies to deal with that because "it doesn't happen." The more I'm here the more I realize there isn't a typical, but there's an overt sense that everybody's really busy, everybody's really smart, but everybody's happy. You may struggle, but you ask your brothers and sisters to pray for you, and things will be okay. But the reality is that most of my friends are in therapy. It's not always that easy. Some people have come full circle and have found spirituality in other places. My roommate has become Orthodox, and she's really set in that and I'm happy for her. But I haven't found that spiritual niche yet. Others still don't know what they want, and there's still that rebellion, not just in smoking and drinking, but in an attitude towards Wheaton. And I just don't feel very passionate about it

anymore. Yeah, I break the pledge, but it was something I did before Wheaton, and it's something I do now, and it's not this big thing for me. But I don't really care what people think of me. I'm not trying to impress anyone. Here I am going to be a senior, and I still haven't figured out what I believe. You'd think after all this time at Wheaton, spiritual things would start to make sense to me, but they haven't. And a lot of me still doesn't care. And I think that puts me in another group.

- - Junior, Female

This student's guilt for not having found a "spiritual niche" is evidence of how pervasive and penetrating the commitment to religion is within the Wheaton student culture. Students at Wheaton College are concerned about their religious life and their spiritual commitments. Most choose to attend Wheaton for this very reason - - they want a Christian educational experience and an opportunity to develop their understanding and commitment to Christianity. However, as the previous student's comments indicate, this commitment includes a full range of perspectives and values. All students raise questions about their faith but choose to answer those questions through different responses.

For the most part, students respond to this pervasive Christian emphasis with one of four prevailing tendencies. One response is a full endorsement of Evangelical Christian values and perspectives. These students demonstrate sincere belief in their faith and seek to implement Christian principles into their life priorities. They sense little reason to question their faith, especially if their questions result in excessive doubt. A second response also endorses Evangelical Christian mores but with a different level of sincerity. Students characterizing this group often are raised in Christian homes but have not entirely incorporated their Christian faith as their own. They are careful to play the role and look "Christian," but may struggle with unresolved questions. Students exhibiting a third response question their faith, but are not as restrained to disregard Evangelical values and norms. These students often react against typical Evangelical practices (i.e. devotions, worship services, prayer meetings), and yet are unwilling to abandon their Christian faith. Instead, they augment their struggles and doubts with a genuine search for a faith that may only look different but fulfills some of the same purposes. A fourth student response is a

complete rejection of Evangelical Christian faith and practice. These students may have accepted the Christian faith at one time, but now find their faith riddled with unresolved conflict and excessive ambiguity. Many label themselves as agnostics, and depending upon the time remaining until graduation, typically choose to withdraw from the institution.

The Academic Life

During a faculty/staff training meeting for new teachers in a recently developed Freshmen Experience course, an experienced and stately Wheaton College senior faculty member addressed the group on the subject of the learning culture among students. His main thesis was that Wheaton students were no longer interested in learning. Disturbed by student apathy and disrespect within the classroom, the professor presented anecdotal evidence that supported his claim levied against students. He gave numerous examples of students slouching down in their seats, yawning, dosing off, and coming to class late. He cited instances where students complained about receiving a grade less than an “A,” even when they had not completed all the course work or missed half the class periods. And for him, study habits of students continued to be dismal. He contested that “students gravitate to what is easy and that they find studying hard and therefore avoid it” (Ryken, 1995, p. 2). He also criticized students who felt that studies were a distraction from the “more significant” learning experiences found in campus leadership positions and ministry. And he criticized secondary education for supporting a massive self-esteem movement which reinforced students’ positive feelings about poor work. In short, he called upon the faculty and staff of Wheaton College to “mount a counter-attack on the anti-intellectualism and contempt for learning that have become the norm on Wheaton’s campus” (Ryken, 1995 p. 7). He felt the urgency to “remind students continually of why they are here - - to assert the primacy of studying, broadly defined” (Ryken, p. 9). In the end, he hoped that students would fight against the “cumulative effect of activities on Wheaton’s campus that becomes a conspiracy that divides students from their studies” (Ryken, p. 9) in order that they may give proper priority to the intellectual life.

Criticisms of this nature regarding today’s college students are not uncommon

(Bennett, 1984; Bloom, 1987). What is surprising is that these comments are made about a population of high caliber students. Wheaton is classified as a highly selective institution, accepting less than 50 percent of its applicants. Of the first year students enrolled in 1995, for example, 95 percent of them averaged a B+ or better in high school (Astin et al., 1995). And almost all scored well above the national average in both Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) preparatory exams.⁴

The ability of incoming students at Wheaton College, however, was not the object of this senior professor's criticisms. Indeed, he acknowledged that Wheaton attracts many talented and intelligent students. Instead, he was concerned about students' lack of motivation for learning. He wanted to address the values, attitudes, and lifestyles of students in regard to learning - - the so-called "culture of learning" enacted and sustained among the college's students. He argued that "the most obvious change that I have noted during the past decade is the loss of the old thrill - - once common - - to be learning something new" (Ryken, 1995, p. 1).

Yet even these accusations seem surprising given the level of commitment to academics among Wheaton students. According to data collected by the Higher Education Research Institute (Astin et al., 1995), in a list of 19 different choices, only "religious orientation" scored above "academic reputation" as reasons given by first year students for attending Wheaton College in 1995. Throughout the fieldwork for this study, many students underscored the importance of academics - - something clearly exemplified by the comments of these two students:

I wanted to come to Wheaton because I realized that the Christian tradition is very rich and there's a lot to draw from, but I knew on my own I wouldn't have the same degree of access to it as I would at a Christian college. I wasn't coming here because of the piety involved. Maybe that is a good reason to come to Wheaton, but that wasn't the thing for me - - that there wasn't going to be drinking or whatever. I came for more of the academics from a Christian perspective. I heard of Wheaton because my sister is a Wheaton graduate. This is the only Christian college I applied to. The other schools I was considering were some of the University of California schools, College of William and Mary, and Columbia. At that point, I

⁴ For composite mean scores on the SAT, Wheaton freshmen in 1995 (combined male and female) scored 1197, well above the national mean score of 902. Likewise for the ACT, Wheaton combined freshmen scores in 1995 averaged 27.6 - - also well above the national average of 20.8 (Annual Admissions Report, 1995).

wasn't considering any other Christian college because I felt like I would be compromising my academic goals.

- - Junior, Male

Academics is the number one priority of students. I don't take academics as serious as the average student (or about 80% of the students), primarily because I came here to play basketball, which is why I used college. But although there are a lot of extra-curricular activities you can do here, most students didn't come here because of that. Most came because of the academic reputation of the school. Based on some of the scores you have to get in here - - I think the average S.A.T. score was like 1350 - - that's just crazy to me. But a lot of my friends are always doing something for school, always something they're studying for. They always want to get a higher grade and are never really satisfied with just getting a 'B' or a 'B-'. It may just be an inner drive that I haven't found. A lot of students did get good grades their whole life, so it's just an expectation they have of themselves.

- - Senior, Male

This disparity in perceptions regarding the academic life of Wheaton students appears problematic. The evidence suggests that within the Wheaton student culture, students give a high priority to academic performance. Similar to Becker's (1963) contentions, Wheaton students obtain a sense of accomplishment in their college experience by focusing upon academic achievement and success. This realization appears to contradict the assertions of the senior faculty member. However, a further investigation of this prevailing academic emphasis reveals differences in students' motivation which both validate and challenge this professor's assumptions. On the one hand, a large contingency of Wheaton students define academic achievement according to grade acquisition. While committed to academic achievement, these students are more interested in acquiring a credential than intellectual discovery. These are the students, as depicted by the senior professor, that often appear apathetic or disinterested in classroom learning. On the other hand, there is a significant number of Wheaton students who value learning for learning sake and are genuinely interested in the development of their intellectual capacities. The senior professor seems to overlook their existence on Wheaton's campus.

This section will explore the academic life of the Wheaton College student culture. Specifically, it will investigate the prevailing academic emphasis among Wheaton students and how this is primarily manifested in either a focus on grades or a focus on learning.

Academic Excellence: The Prevailing Emphasis on Academic Achievement and Success

According to respondents, Wheaton students take their academic tasks very seriously and devote considerable attention to academic pursuits. Although many things consume the time and energies of Wheaton students, the academic life seems to be the one aspect that never fades. Many students alluded to the value they placed on academic achievement when they spoke of their own - - and other's - - desire to "go far" and "succeed" after college. One freshman female, for instance, hinted at this when she said:

Generally speaking, academics is all people do around here. Compared to what other friends going to other colleges say, the majority of things that happen here revolve around academics. People are always studying. Play is definitely a second emphasis. . . . To get in here, you have to have a certain IQ or whatever, and that's the students that they draw and that's the students that they get - - students that do perform well, are serious minded when it comes to academics, and they want to go far.

This "wanting to go far" is characteristic of students who are high achievers. Because they have excelled in many ways before college, they come to college with some of the same high standards. But what is expected for themselves is also expected for others, so the student culture reinforces the high ambitions of all students by imposing the same drive for "going far" and accomplishing something great.

I think students expect that when you graduate from here you're supposed to do something huge. They are always asking what you're going to do when you leave or what you're going to do with your degree. For me it doesn't seem to be enough for me to say that I'm just going to take pictures. It's not good enough, you have to accomplish something.

- - Sophomore, Female

I found that students were very academic, and certainly being in philosophy I may get more of that than other majors. I mean coming in and hearing students' astronomical S.A.T. scores, and the fact that they even talk about their astronomical S.A.T. scores and not like that their parents made them come but that they're really into studying. Like for General Education classes they go out of their way to do all this work and read everything to detail. Whereas most students would probably blow off General Education courses or not even go. I think you have both here, but there is definitely an academic pressure here to succeed, to do well, to go to graduate school. I'd never thought about graduate school until I came here, and all of a sudden there's this pressure that "of course everybody's going to graduate school." It's to the extent that I've run into students that only want to surround themselves with academic people. They want to be professors. They want to go to graduate school (I actually heard someone say this) so that "I can be around people as smart as I am." That just turns my stomach.

But even I pushed myself to succeed academically, but I think here it's even more so and you even get it from the administration - - "you're the cream of the crop, you're the children of the reformation" - - you feel like you have to live up to both academic and spiritual standings.

- - Junior, Female

Students regularly commented about the academic focus of their peers, even to the point of labeling their peers in a facetious manner.

You can probably find people along the spectrum, but we're pretty "nerdy" here, especially compared to most other colleges that I visit. I have friends that go to Westmont or Taylor, and several state schools. For them, weekends is just living life, and there's a little tension to do some homework. Whereas here, I know so many people who, if they don't study on Friday night, then they'll most likely study on Saturday night - - not necessarily everyone on campus, but a large number of students.

- - Senior, Male

It is true that not all students fit this "nerdy" characterization; however, even students less serious about academics at Wheaton still demonstrate a level of concern about the academic life.

At Wheaton, even the slackards will study. You don't have people here completely blowing off classes. We have a lot of slackards in the communications major, but the people who are in there will still do all the assignments and show up for class over fifty percent of the time. So they're slackards only in comparison.

- - Senior, Male

Whether it's pressure from the student culture or pressure from the administration, students expect to perform well academically at Wheaton. It's not enough to just come to college because many have their aspirations set even beyond their time at Wheaton. One senior female student admitted, "I was always kind of driven, and it was kind of assumed that I would be a doctor someday, so college was just a given." This "drive" for many of the students is reinforced by the academic reputation of the institution. Comments from faculty and staff stating that Wheaton students are the "cream of the crop" with increasingly higher SAT and ACT scores reported each year do not go unnoticed by students. They take to heart many of the comments about the caliber of students here at Wheaton, and strive to achieve the same classification. With high expectations placed upon them from the administration, from other students, and from themselves, students develop a strong drive to succeed.

Overall what's important is a really strong success ethic. . . There's a lot of emphasis placed on academic success, and emphasis on sort of the balanced Christian life - - academic success coupled with being really ardent for Christianity, and somehow doing both really well. So student life can sometimes be pretty competitive as a result. It also creates a need to kind of find a group to escape that classroom competition and stuff. Perhaps it's my major, because if you go to some of my classes, you would have the front two rows packed full of students and we never really cover stuff that well because there is so much emphasis within the classroom placed on asking perceptive questions, so it was frustrating for the lack of information that we didn't cover. We would go a whole quad and only discuss three philosophers when on the syllabus we were supposed to discuss six. And after class, the teacher would be barraged by people waiting to ask questions that they had obviously been thinking about while the teacher was lecturing instead of listening to the lecture. In fact, one time some Connectors (prospective student visitors) were visiting a class, and even one of them raised his hand and started asking several questions about these philosophers, so even before they get here they start in. Other signs might be looking in the library and seeing how many students plug away there. In one sense it can be negative because it puts more emphasis on status, and less emphasis on actual learning. There's kind of a hierarchy. People who are TA's their junior year are the upper echelon of philosophy majors. And then there's the people who ask consistently perceptive questions who really do ask good questions, and then the rest of them are sort of awash. You can ask any philosophy major, and they'll point out to you who the top students are.

- - Senior, Male

Part of "being successful" is being able to prove oneself to others and to win their approval. For many students, this approval comes from the caretakers of academics - - the faculty. And while respect and admiration for Wheaton faculty is not lacking among Wheaton students, several interviewees suggested that the motivations behind their interactions with faculty were generated by less than altruistic purposes. As one senior explained:

In the classroom there's an expectation to do well. When I don't do well now, I almost kind of feel bad. I feel like I'm letting my professor down, because they're always telling us how we're the cream of the crop. I feel like we ought to do well in class. I think here professors are looked at as friends sometimes. Classes are so personal here. You don't have real huge class sizes, so a lot of times you can get to know your professor more than you would at a really big school. So if you are just a total slacker and don't care, you feel like you're wasting your professor's time and you're wasting your time. Not like you feel the pressure that you have to get an "A." But you feel like you have to put forth some effort, and at least do a decent job. So students respond to the expectation for academics pretty favorably. If not for the professor, then at least for themselves.

- - Senior, Male

Another student added:

Students desire to get respect from faculty. That's because it's a small college, and because professors here tend to be great mentors and friends. . . I suppose some of it may also be attributed to the fact that students have to get a recommendation from faculty. But I think a lot of it is that these professors I deal with on a personal basis as well as in class, and I don't want them to think that I'm not interested in them or what they're interested in.

- - Senior, Male

In addition to proving themselves to professors, students try to prove themselves to other students. As attested by many students, a competitive attitude often accompanies their drive for success.

Wheaton students are some of the most competitive students I've ever been around. Just to get in here they had to have good grades, so whereas they stood out in high school, they're status quo at Wheaton. In my high school I was considered pretty smart, and I'm one of the dumb ones here. There's definitely a strong desire on students' part to be successful and make something of themselves. I think you'll find that at most higher academic institutions, especially expensive ones, because parents are making sacrifices and there's a lot of expectations put on the four years of college. A lot of competitiveness is instilled by the parents. I'm more phlegmatic in nature, so insofar as academics are concerned, I've always been pretty confident that I'm pretty smart, so I could care less what other people think - - even though I'm usually toward the bottom end of the spectrum. That competitive drive may have been all they've ever had, where they experience success, and that success came from them being diligent in whatever they did in high school. For people who had things come more naturally for them, they don't have the same competitive spirit, because they've found success in plenty of areas, so it doesn't really matter. But a lot of students come in here and academics has been their whole life, so the next step is to think about the future, and if you want to get a good job and do well in the real world, then academics is still important.

- - Junior, Male

True to their competitive, success-oriented nature, many Wheaton students thrive on the challenge to excel and try hard to make a name for themselves. This characteristic is clearly identified by the following two respondents.

I think students love (academic pressure) because I think it's one of the biggest reasons most people are at Wheaton. People are very capable when they come, and I think they want to know to be even more capable. . . . Students here want to be challenged to new heights and learn to think things through.

- - Senior, Female

Students thrive on the expectation to excel. When students hear it they

expect it because first of all you go through a tough process to get in here which is hard enough as it is. Therefore, you understand that there's quality that Wheaton has in order to come here. Once you get here, you see about 2,000 other people who are very similar in the way they think in the sense of expectations about themselves and the community. So then you think, "okay, I'm not this or that anymore," so you have to find out who you are, but in finding out who you are, you still have to excel. I think Wheaton students understand that and they like it. They like challenge.

- - Sophomore, Female

Because they sense the challenge, Wheaton students are also notorious for believing in the Protestant work ethic. In order to achieve what they want in life, many have come to accept that it will take hard work and personal discipline. This is reflected in the comments of two seniors:

I come from a Pennsylvania German Mennonite kind of culture, so all growing up we heard the phrase, "if it's worth doing, it's worth doing right." So this work ethic demanded nothing less than your best. I took that with me into academics. I could settle for a "B", but if I just worked an hour more, I know I could get the "A", so I may as well just do it - - sacrifice a little sleep, but get it done.

- - Senior, Female

Discipline is important - - working hard to achieve things, a mentality of achievement. Even in spiritual matters where that's not always something that works, discipline is a key word. The emphasis came from our parents and high school and what we've done in the past and a lot of what has worked. A lot of students hit a breaking point discovering that no matter how much work they put into it, it's not going to hold up. But a lot accept that discipline and work is the only way to achieve something. I have that mentality - - if I want to buy something or wholly understand some concept, I have to study and that takes time and effort. There's some truth to that.

- - Senior, Male

Students who work hard have the habit of constantly looking for areas in which to improve. As a result, work is never finished; there is always more that can be done. Because this belief is shared by many, students report a pressure within the student culture to always be doing more. Students who fail to meet prescribed standards express feelings of guilt for somehow not working hard enough. One student, for instance, said that:

Students feel really bad when they don't fulfill their work. The majority of people I know always do their work and get good grades. But those that don't, it's always a very subtle, under-their-breath kind of thing that, "I just failed a test," or "I can't hack it." Then suddenly, either they're gone, like they dropped out, or you don't really hear about it.

- - Freshman, Female

One indication that students try to work hard is that they report being very busy. Even students who are caught up in their work will try to fill their time with something in order to feel productive. Unfortunately, students often don't know when to stop, and their over-activity and busy-work leads to unhealthy lifestyle choices and eventually physical illness. For the 1995-96 academic school year, the college's Health Center recorded 13,767 clinic-only visits - - an average of 96.3 students per day (based on 143 academic days). For an institution with approximately only 2,250 students, these figures seem dramatic. Also, a Wheaton College Health Assessment and Evaluation Survey (1996) reported a high rate of eating disorder incidents, particularly among female students, as students tried to cope with what they considered to be a very stressful life. As exemplified by the following student's comments, even though students are aware of potential "burn-out," their drive to achieve often pushes them to counter-productive extremes.

I do think that the institution has acknowledged that there's a problem with busyness on this campus, that people are over-committed and under-nurtured. We spread ourselves so thin that we're not really growing or learning, we're just burning out. We hear that message in chapel and in classes and from residence life. I think there's a definite concern for the students here that we do so much. The college seeks to provide opportunities for the student to get involved, but I think the students seek to be kings and queens of their domains. My freshman year I had several involvements, and my sophomore year I doubled them, and it really killed me. I was doing six extracurricular activities at once. I never knew that my life could be so stressful, and I had never been like that before in my life. I think busyness is a problem for students, and it's a combination of things that people want to have more fun and more success and more Christian commitment. And the being and the doing get confused a lot. We want to be a certain way, so we do a certain thing. But it becomes counter-productive.

- - Senior, Male

Despite over-commitments and stressful levels of involvement, it is clear that Wheaton students value academic achievement and take their roles as students seriously. The student culture reinforces a positive outlook on academics, and cultivates an intensity for student achievement and success. To be sure, being a "good student" in a highly individualistic and competitive sense is a value frequently underscored in Wheaton's student culture.

Yet, what does such an attitude toward "success" and a value on academic

achievement mean for the culture of learning at Wheaton College. Are these attitudes and values responsible for student disinterest in the classroom? What would lead yet another professor to comment that “the life of the mind has never been held in primacy at this school . . . The general problem is student apathy” (Gallien, cited in Hagen, 1995, p. 7)? Or still another professor to remark that “for good or ill, I don’t find the kind of passionate commitment to the life of the mind that I find at secular schools. . . I would like to see Wheaton become intellectually ambitious and less grade conscious” (Jacobs’s, cited in Hagen, 1995, p. 6). For students who reportedly take their education very seriously, these faculty accusations seem misdirected.

Perhaps an answer to this apparent discrepancy can be found within Dr. Jacob’s own remarks. He would like to see students become more intellectually ambitious and less grade conscious - - thus creating a distinction between two aspects of the academic enterprise, learning and grades. Similarly, conversations with students would lead one to believe that learning and grades are mutually exclusive. The feelings among students are that if one chooses to focus on learning in classes, one’s grades will suffer. Conversely, if one concentrates on getting a good grade, learning will be sacrificed - - at least the kind of learning they’re interested in. A sophomore female summarized the views of her peers on this point when she indicated that:

There’s a distinction between learning and grades. The students here that are really into learning don’t usually have the best grades. But the stuff they know I see applied in their lives and everything they do, so they’ve got it. But the students just concerned about the grade learn stuff to get the grade, and I don’t know how much it really affects them.

Students strive for a good education, but the question can be raised as to what they consider a good education. They demonstrate strong commitments to the academic life, but what they feel to be important for learning may be contrasted from the faculty’s conception of appropriate learning. Wheaton students display a strong orientation toward academic success - - an orientation that is grounded in their own and others’ expectations for achievement. But the rationale behind much of this intensity - - the drive for academic excellence - - is often more about a credential than personal development. The majority of students learn to secure a good grade rather than learning for learning’s sake. To some

faculty, Wheaton students appear apathetic to learning. In reality, they're only apathetic to a certain type of learning. The concerns expressed by these (and other) faculty members should be as much about the nature of learning for Wheaton students as they are about the motivation for learning among students. How students define academic success is the question that merits concern.

The Prevalent Perspective of Wheaton Students on Academic Excellence: A Focus on Grades

For the majority of students, acquiring good or at least acceptable grades is what constitutes academic excellence. Learning, growth, maturity - - these are all important to Wheaton students, but as one student put it, are only an "incidental consequence" to the more pressing objective of obtaining an impressive transcript:

Grades are important to students. A lot of us have established ourselves in the past as over-achievers or do well in school. If you got in here you would have had to do reasonably well. Unfortunately, more than it should be, there's a sort of disinterested desire to learn, where learning is just the incidental consequence of good grades. I don't exempt myself from this - - of occasionally just going for the grade when I'm really not too interested. So you see it in classes when people just really want to get it done, looking for the right answer, without really a quest for learning.

- - Senior, Male

Another senior offered his perspective/viewpoint on the instrumental motivations of Wheaton students:

What's important to students is trying to get good grades. I say that rather than saying Wheaton college students are concerned with learning and improving their minds. I'm not sure if that's really quite the case. . . . Wheaton students generally don't discuss or talk about issues. Depending upon your major (and I think I'm in the minority of good ones that cultivate this sort of feeling that what I'm learning in class is really neat and I'm really into this and this is really part of me and something I'm really concerned about and really passionate about), if you could somehow be a fly on a wall in Anderson Dining Commons, and listen to most people's conversations, I think many more of them could be much more substantial, much more about either academic questions, concerns and intellectual problems but more importantly, I think people could be much more honest with each other about like, "here's where I am, this is what I think, this is how I feel in terms of personal concerns" rather than I guess less superficial things. In terms of grades, I guess there's just a bigger concern that the grade is the appearance of what I've done, so in a certain sense, most people would rather have this nice mark on this paper to show someone, to

show that “look, I got an ‘A’ in this class so I know what I’m talking about.” That’s quite a bit easier than sort of becoming that person that displays an excellence in understanding.

- - Senior, Male

Many students were not shy to admit that the appearance of competence through a high grade was more important to them and their peers than actually being competent in a given area. From their perspective, a grade provided immediate feedback, and at times, immediate gratification. It served as a powerful symbol of ability and achievement, and for some, even an indication of intelligence. One junior male student, comparing himself with philosophy students (who are perceived on campus as particularly smart), readily associated intellectual ability with grade point average (GPA) performance. He argued, “I would consider myself just as intellectually strong as them. I guarantee that my GPA is right around where theirs is.” Hence a high grade served as a status symbol for students - - it distinguished academic success from academic failure. It is no surprise, therefore, that a great deal of prestige and respect coincides with a high GPA. One senior male bluntly stated that, “it’s an immediate respect that is gained when people find out your GPA or people know how smart you are or see the results of your work.” And still another student, a junior male, was honest enough to admit that, “Grades are important to me because of an internal desire and pressure to do well. It’s pride.”

Students who are in the formative years of developing their identity crave the prestige and positive self-esteem that results from high grade performance. When they encounter many high caliber students, however, and constantly hear that each incoming freshmen class has higher average SAT or ACT scores than their own, many feel threatened about potentially losing this source of security and significance. As the competition among students becomes more intense, the pressure to achieve high grades only increases. Students fear that they will be unable to keep up with the academic competition. Such fear catapults many coping strategies: students study longer hours, pick up “short cuts” from their peers, or resort to other less than admirable “strategic tactics” (such as appeasing the professor). In short, they learn how to play the academic game much like an actor learns how to perform in a show:

My expectation about academic life was that I would really learn and really

study and really soak up knowledge like a sponge. But that was so idealized. What really happened is that I just learned a new game. Instead of learning how to play the high school games to get what you needed done by the certain time to get a certain grade, I learned the college games. Only recently this year have I become more of a learner than an actor.

- - Senior, Male

Students described an array of tactics that they used to acquire higher grades. Many tried to manipulate faculty into changing a course requirement or changing one's grade from an assignment. Students demanded that professors stipulate course requirements clearly to ensure that they knew the standards upon which they would be graded. Any breach of predetermined grading standards was met with strong resistance from students. Attempts were also made to clarify what exactly a professor liked or disliked in an assignment; such a strategy helped students to know what to regurgitate back to the professor. In this manner, little attention was given to student thinking and learning about course content and more attention to things such as particular writing styles, favorite phrases or words, or specific conclusions accepted and appreciated by the professor. As one sophomore female explained:

You can see that the grade is a priority by the importance that students put into finding out what the faculty want and finding out what they can do to get that "A". I hear remarks like, "I should get an A in this class." The emphasis is on "should" and not on taking the time to learn this or that. There is not as much conversation about what is picked up from a class.

Students also strategically position themselves to maintain a good GPA by avoiding courses that demand considerable amounts of work or work that is complicated. Older students typically provide younger students with information regarding which courses to take or not to take, the type and amount of work required for each class, and which professors are good or bad. Through the student grapevine, students may learn what the bare minimum requirements are for receiving a good grade from a class and professor. One Wheaton professor referred to this phenomenon as "academic minimalism" where "students bargain down to the lowest common denominator - - i.e., doing the least amount of work possible to get a good grade" (Gallian, cited in Hagen, p. 7, 1995). Students often talked about "getting their homework out of the way" or completing an assignment "just to get it done." Seldom was a discussion about what was being learned included in

their comments.

The result of the aforementioned student efforts is a rather sterile student learning culture. Students become incredibly adept at following the rules, finding the right answers, and practicing political maneuvers necessary for acquisition of external rewards, but incorporate very few of the skills and processes involved in personal development and long-term learning. Their education is a pragmatic education - - where students learn to give whatever it takes to get the grade - - but offers only small strides toward any kind of self-education.

When asked, most students admitted to feeling guilty about going after high grades. The general consensus was that learning is a higher calling and should be the focus of one's collegiate education. Yet students continually struggle to shake what Becker (1963) refers to as the "grade point average perspective." This wrestling between a desire for learning and a compelling concern for grades was evident in the following student's experience:

For me, I just like to get good grades. I think grades can reflect a lot. Students here are also probably interested in learning to get a grade. I'm trying to focus more on learning instead of grades. I'm trying to think of more questions and really do my work. I always do my work well, but I know it's basically out of a fear of getting a bad grade. Here I think the fear of getting a bad grade is bigger than learning. Because if I don't learn, that's one thing, but is that really going to be such a big deal? But I know that's probably not a good attitude to have, because it is a big deal. In the whole scheme of things, it is a big deal. But at the time it's not a big deal. Because if I get good grades, when I go home, I know I can get into graduate school. That's one very important thing. So grades are kind of getting more and more important to me, especially as I think about graduation and graduate school after Wheaton. Students here also go after the grade. I've never seen so many students so on the ball. I went to the best prep school in the state of Hawaii, but here the students are even more amazing. I see so many doing extra credit work, because that's what you need to do to get a good grade. So I feel like if I can do anything, I'm going to do it just because it's just so hard. You can't always be perfect, so I try hard where I can.

- - Freshman, Female

In the end, many students succumb to the pressures of perceived external forces. Many will do whatever it takes to secure a good grade and thereby satisfy whatever external standards have been established for excellence in academic achievement. Behind their competitive drive, behind their zeal for grades, then, rests a general fear of failure. To be

successful in life and avoid failure, students feel that they must demonstrate competency - - a competency most easily identified through a grade point average. They are motivated not as much by personal goals but by the goals they perceive to be dictated for them by outside sources. One student labeled this as extrinsic motivation:

People definitely try to make sure they do well in their academics. Failure is something that is too scary to them. They would want to make sure they keep getting the "A's" or do well. But it's mostly extrinsic motivation. People almost see classes as a necessary evil to get your degree or to get your 3.7. Academics is not a joyful thing, where it's like, "oh yeah, I'm learning, this is good." It's more like, "I need to learn this so that I can go out to the real world and do what I want."

- - Junior, Male

So what are the extrinsic motivations which compel students to strive for high grades? What do students fear if they fail? In analyzing interview data from this study, three such motivations repeatedly were mentioned by students. These included: (1) demands of graduate schools; (2) acquisition of money and resources from lucrative employment; and (3) expectations from parents.

In addressing some of these trends among students, a Wheaton professor urged the students to "find some meaning other than the grade for what you're doing. Develop your inner drive rather than external grades" (Mitchell, cited in Hagen, 1995, p. 7). A typical retort from students to this plea is, "yeah, go tell that to the graduate schools." Students' expectations to attend graduate school are high within the Wheaton community. Students report feeling this pressure from faculty, staff, and even fellow students. And many, in keeping with their high aspirations, feel that they must gain admission into a reputable graduate school with competitive academic standards. In this overall scheme, grades become a "make or break" element, then, in the perceived future success of students. As two interviewees explained:

When I originally came, I didn't want to go for the grades, I wanted to actually learn, and let the grades fall as they may. Unfortunately, about seventy-five percent of the time I've felt like I don't give a rip about any of this, I want an "A" and get out of here. What I wanted out of Wheaton - - I saw it as kind of a stepping stone to get into graduate school.

- - Junior, Male

I think everybody here cares about the grades. That's what gets me. All the professors here say, "don't worry about your grade. Grades don't mean

anything.” But for me, grades can screw my life, because if I don’t get the grades, I don’t get into dental school. I don’t become a dentist. So grades are very important to me. So that bothers me when I hear that.

- - Junior, Male

Closely connected to graduate education is the realization of future employment. Students want an excellent graduate education in order to secure a good job. What a good job brings is financial security. Even though many would denounce the “evils of materialism,” many have grown accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle. 54 percent of incoming 1995 Wheaton freshmen class came from homes where annual parental incomes were above \$60,000 (Astin et al., 1995). This figure can be compared against the national figure (36%) for this same category (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1996). Because many Wheaton students have grown up in wealthy homes, having access to money and possessions is often assumed. Consequently, as many students testify, the allure of materialism is often overlooked or even denied.

A lot of students have grown up very financially secure, so I think they carry those same values a lot of times implicitly without really knowing it. Like nobody would ever say, “yeah, I really like having all this stuff.” But I think a lot of people have grown up with a lot of stuff, and it’s not something that they counter in their life. It’s just a value that they kind of keep. I think a lot of people here are upper middle class more than even just middle class. People have a lot of stuff here, and don’t know what it’s like to really not have it. You hear people say that, “Oh, I don’t have money for this or that.” And I’m like, “Well, you have three cars and a house and a pool. Somewhere in there is some money.” And I don’t think they even realize it. Students think they don’t have money, but I’m like, “you have food!” But that’s not part of their mind set.

- - Junior, Female

There’s a certain level of affluence here. It’s important to students at a certain level. I don’t know if they can help it if you’re brought up with that, what can you do. You can’t help it - - there’s this notion that you should make it better than your parents, that we’re going to all move up. It’s hard to divorce that even from Christianity, because it’s an American principle.

- - Junior, Male

There’s a lot of kids here with a lot of stuff. While we profess a faith and advocate simplicity and non-materialism, all those things are seductive to us. We value stuff, things, CDs, cars, what kind of mountain bike you have, what kind of clothes you wear, etc. We are no different from other schools in how we value material things.

- - Sophomore, Male

The emphasis placed on grades as an instrument for future life success is also

fueled by students fear of changing economic conditions. Many interviewees told stories of older friends who had graduated and struggled to find employment. They discussed pessimistic reports about the declines in starting salaries and the rises in cost of living. They felt the growing skepticism surrounding students being able to achieve their parents' standard of living. And many were worried. Even though they understood and were supportive of a liberal arts education, many Wheaton students have become more concerned about developing their careers than using college as a time of intellectual or personal growth. Holtz (1995, p. 125) comments that "with the disappearance of high-paying, unskilled jobs, a college education is as much about survival as anything else. Students no longer go to college just to learn. They go to college because they have to." Hence, students' focus on grades is precipitated by a sense of urgency; many feel that they must get a good job to be able to ensure a certain standard of living.

Getting good grades is one thing that students realize will exist or has direct implications for life after Wheaton. In other words, all their relationships and all their fun times are kind of particular to their locality here. But the degree to which they involve themselves in academics now is kind of their ticket to wherever they feel they need to go later on.

- - Junior, Male

A lot of students come in here and academics has been their whole life, so the next step is to think about the future, and if you want to get a good job and do well in the real world, then academics are still important. A high percentage of Wheaton graduates are not going to go to the mission field. They're going to go into the regular world and get regular jobs. We'd all like to say that money is not a factor; money is important not so much that we want to live a worldly life, but once again it's like getting an "A", when you make a lot of money it's proof that you've done well. It's not so much a mark that your desires are material as much as that you're just successful. So I think that pushes a lot of people.

- - Junior, Male

To be sure, the rising costs of private higher education in America also contributes to students' anxiety about future employment prospects and the need to build up an impressive transcript to "haul down" a lucrative job in an increasingly competitive economy. The September 27, 1996 edition of the campus newspaper, The Wheaton Record, reported that according to the U.S. News & World Report annual ranking of national liberal arts colleges, Wheaton ranked sixteenth in the category of institutions whose students incurred the most debt after graduation. In 1995, Wheaton College

graduates had an average educational indebtedness of \$17,406. This realization is usually enough of a motivation for students to take their academic work seriously. However, this figure also tends to impact the perspective of yet a third extrinsic motivation for students - - their parents. Because parents are often helping to pay college costs, their interest in their son or daughter being able to find a good job is heightened. And once again, the easiest indicator for parents of academic success is GPA. As one student elaborated:

GPA tends to be the final measure sometimes with parents. Parents can't see some of the great talks that you have in your dorm room, and they don't really know what you mean when you say that you've studied really hard for certain tests or that you wrote a really great paper. They just can't understand that, but they can see a point value from a GPA. So if students are pressured at all by their parents, it's probably the pressure that's applied with numbers and GPA. I don't think I know anyone who is completely driven by this - - the fear or pressure from parents. I think it's a factor in just about everybody's mind, though, because usually it's not based so much on performance or acceptance from their parents, but rather just a financial matter. In other words, "Dad's footing the bill, so I need to do and make this certain mark in order to justify the expense that he's paying." I hear a lot of that. "As long as I'm above a 3.0, my parents will pay for it and they're happy. They feel like they're getting their money's worth. I think a lot of it comes down to the bottom line as far as the parent's money. Because most students, and I've heard this a lot, are fine with their parents as far as acceptance and love. If they failed in a class, they wouldn't be kicked out of the home. But it really does come down to the money. In that sense some students may not really be pressured by parents so much as from people who are giving them loans or scholarships or those kinds of things. That kind of drives students to make certain grades too. For me, it's really kind of a mixed bag.

- - Junior, Male

Added to the combined pressures of gaining admission to graduate school, getting a good-paying job, and meeting the expectations of parents, is a religious commitment to living a good life and doing well. As noted earlier, students take their Christianity seriously, and can at times associate high grades as yet another indication of one's religious commitment. A kind of moral quality is attached to a good grade. One student offered a poignant observation when she said:

A grade is important because no matter how you put it, that "A" signifies that I'm excelling so therefore I'm not a loser. In their minds, you can't be both a Christian and a loser. You have to excel in everything. And if you're not, then that's one area of sin in your life that you need to conquer. And also there's the emphasis on getting into graduate school and getting a job - - a job that can make you money and live like your parents live. I

never knew Christians were that wealthy until I got here. Getting the grade is not characteristic of all the students, but the percentage is high (mid 80's). With the other 20 percent, probably half of them don't know what they're looking for. When you're put in an environment like this, you start conforming even if you don't want to, like me. You can get pressure from outside, or you can start putting pressure upon yourself and being like, "okay, this is what you can and cannot do." That can be because you don't want to be mediocre.

- - Sophomore, Female

A Marginal Perspective of Wheaton Students on Academic Excellence: A Focus on Learning

A large percentage of Wheaton students focus on grades as an indication of academic success. But this is not reflective of the entire community. Contrary to the pessimism of some faculty members, Wheaton College also displays characteristics of a vibrant learning culture among students. In reality, apathy in the classroom is not universal. A minority of students legitimately care only about what knowledge they've gained from a course or how they've grown personally in their academic experience. One student underscored this viewpoint in this way:

Grades are important to me. My GPA is like a 3.45, so it's definitely not like I'm failing out. But I just feel like I'd much rather be concerned with really learning and really knowing that I'm being challenged and being taught, and that I'm having the opportunity to expand my mind, and to learn more and just be better equipped than to know that I'm just memorizing things and getting good grades just to be able to graduate with some sort of special honor. I would much rather leave here with just a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of who God is and who I am and how I'm supposed to interact with this world, and how I'm supposed to interact with the church. And I think every class I've taken plays into that. So it's definitely a priority, but not in the sense of just going for the grade.

- - Senior, Female

Indeed, when compared to other institutions, Wheaton students at least express stronger interest in learning. One indication of this can be deciphered from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) data (Astin et al., 1995). For the entering freshmen class of 1995, students selected (from a list of 11 suggestions) those reasons they saw as very important in deciding to go to college. The most popular choice among all freshmen nationally was "to be able to get a better job" (77.3% of all freshmen). This was only the fourth highest measure for Wheaton students (45.5% of all freshmen). Conversely,

Wheaton students chose “to learn more about things that interest me” (87% of all Wheaton freshmen) as their primary reason for attending college, followed by “to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas” (77% of all Wheaton freshmen). For the national aggregate scores, these same reasons were ranked as important by only 74% and 62.5% of all students, respectively. It is also very revealing that only 25.5% of the Wheaton freshmen ranked “to be able to make more money” as important (Astin et al., 1995), whereas for all college freshmen in 1995, 72.3% of them ranked it as important (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1996). While these figures do not reflect any indication of a focus on grades, they seem to suggest that Wheaton students are at least initially more focused on learning than the average freshman student nationally.

Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that the focus on grades may wane as a student interacts with Wheaton’s institutional learning culture and gains a deeper appreciation for liberal learning. As reflected by one student’s perspective, at least some upper-class students seem to be less fearful of a grade and appear more sensitive to the need for personal learning as opposed to only grade acquisition.

For a lot of students the grade is more important. I think it’s important for image and being the best and going on to be more of the best. But it’s more like that freshmen and sophomore years. For me, I really struggled my freshman year because I didn’t do really well, and it was a struggle because I wasn’t getting an ‘A’ like what I could get in high school. But now, I don’t even know about my grades because I just feel like I’m learning so much. So maybe it’s a developmental thing. You start to see what’s really important as you stay here longer.

- - Senior, Female

In fact, some upper-class students (and even underclass students) react against the notion that students are only grade conscious at Wheaton. Many contend that learning for its own sake is very evident among their peers.

We’re told that we are to educate ourselves. There’s definitely an emphasis on the value of education; the value of learning for learning sake and learning about many different things - - and not just skills, but learning about things that you may never use. For the most part, students accept this expectation. I think it’s a good thing. We’re learning how to think more than we’re learning how to roll a camera or something. Learning how to be creative is more important than learning how to draw here. Some of my friends who are Communications majors are frustrated because they’re graduating and don’t feel ready for a job or for graduate school. But I think if they were to sit down and ask why they were doing it, they’d know that it

was to understand the world they live in. But there's a lot of them who would say to get rid of general education classes, especially foreign language stuff, because they feel like they'll never use this stuff. . . . But on the whole I would say students like general education classes because students will leave with what a liberal arts college sets out to do - - and that's to teach people how to think. No student is here to become a great . . . (fill in the blank). They came here for the spiritual dynamic, to get to know the professors well, and to grow as a person, rather than grow as a professional.

- - Senior, Male

While there is certainly a subculture of students who value and foster the life of the mind more than other students, and while it is true that a large percentage of students only focus on obtaining good grades, it can also be said that many Wheaton students display characteristics of a vibrant learning culture. As demonstrated by the comments of these three respondents, students speak of the dominant student culture as analytical and thoughtful, often involved in critical thinking, and oriented toward meaningful discussions.

One thing that's important here is the thoughtful kind of life, analyzing why. Students don't do anything unless you tell them why. . . . Students want to know why they're thinking what they're thinking. People are very into reading. They've read a lot of different views so if you come at them with a view they want to know why you think that way because they know of all the alternatives. A lot people enjoy thinking, there's a lot of opinionated people, so when you challenge them they don't just embrace it, they want to know why they should change their mind.

- - Junior, Female

There's a lot of critical thinking that goes on here after chapels and after things like the "revival" last year. There was a lot of discussion with people trying to figure out what happened and what we should think about that. The interaction between student cultures is one of the most valuable things, along with interaction with faculty culture and administration culture. Those three dynamics are an interesting part of being at Wheaton.

- - Senior, Male

Interaction with professors and students one-on-one - - this type of discussing is important. There's always an interesting discussion going on in the dorm lounges late at night. There is a great deal of talk and interaction about various issues. The student culture values discussion and debate.

- - Junior, Male

Another indication of a vibrant learning culture among students is a lack of emphasis on vocation. Wheaton students are concerned about future careers, but not to the extent that it becomes their only priority. Many students interpret their educational experience as an important time of preparation and personal development. Consider, for

example, the views of these two students:

You've got the focus on academics here and it's very important to a lot of students. I think you think a lot more here. I don't want to say we're more mature than other campuses because I don't think we are, but in terms of ultimate issues, I guess I just don't see as much of a focus on what job am I going to get when I get out - - at least not as much as at other campuses. I've got a friend at Princeton who is talking about interviewing with forty different employers. There's so much competition because everybody was looking at the same jobs, and I thought, I haven't seen any of that. Maybe it's because I'm not in the business department. But there's just a greater sense that there is ultimate meaning beyond getting out of college and making money.

- - Senior, Female

My ultimate goal is not to get a job. This frustrates my father. I'm here to get an education. I'm majoring in philosophy because I thought that would be the best education I could get. I'm doing some work in other areas. I don't think of getting an education that's going to last me the rest of my life, but to get a taste of various sources that I can draw on later, to learn habits and skills that I can later develop and cultivate in my life. I want to learn things that will help me be a better person, be a better Christian, to help me think better and make better decisions and be wiser. So wisdom may be the ultimate goal or end. Aristotle uses the example of the man who wants to be physically fit so he works hard physically. But it's about developing your soul. It's learning and reading and becoming a better person. It's a holistic thing and I want to help prepare myself for a life of action. I've sought this by choosing courses which I thought would give me the best well-rounded education. Mostly in my classroom endeavors, and in how I try to approach my classes and integrate them. Half of my course work is in the sciences, being pre-medicine. Being a philosophy major I've had quite a bit of course work in philosophy. Being a minor in urban studies, I've taken course work in social sciences. I don't want to close myself to any discipline or source. I try to understand things interdisciplinary and how they affect me and my life as well as others' lives.

- - Junior, Male

The previous student is a clear example of someone focused upon learning in his college experience. While this student would not be indicative of the majority of Wheaton students, he is reflective of a student population concerned about such things as a well-rounded education and whole person development. Some students expressed frustration with the fragmentation of knowledge within many American academic settings, and chose to attend Wheaton College because of its concentration upon liberal arts education. Many students spoke about coming to Wheaton to acquire a grounding in their beliefs. One senior male phrased it as "the one thing that I always wanted to get out of Wheaton is to say when I left that this is what I believe and here's why I believe it." Thus, there is a strong

commitment among many students to have their academic experience go well beyond mere credentials. Notice this commitment in the words of two seniors:

Most of us have learned to care less about grades. I want to do well, but I realize that there's a lot of other stuff to life. It's really weird. I used to get all "A's", but now I'm satisfied with a "B" or a "C." I don't know if that means I'm not learning as much. Other people are also like this, and I know people are learning.

- - Senior, Male

It seems like an important thing in college is to not leave just having a whole bunch of new information, but it's to become a person. When you are that person, instead of just giving information to someone, information should lead to something else (at least in the humanities, maybe not in the sciences). So I see it as my goal to become a kind of person who works on my own reactions to things when I'm in a situation. Then when things arise or whatever, then I respond as that person that I've been working on. Friends are really important for that. I've got friends that really challenge me a lot in different ways. Some of them really challenge me positively in my faith, some really challenge me intellectually in my studies. Some are really apostate and don't have any faith at all, so they challenge me to have a response to them and know how to live with them.

- - Senior, Male

From these comments, it is clear that some students at Wheaton consider their learning experience as more than just classroom involvements. Students discover that "there's a lot of other stuff to life" than just grades. They realize that much of their learning comes from extracurricular involvements - - especially through social relationships with friends. A sense of this is found within the following student's account of what happens when students just "hang out."

Hanging out involves a lot of really nerdy intellectual discussions. Two of the guys I live with are philosophy majors, and I like to mingle in that crowd, so there's a lot of discussion about anything, sometimes it's really sick, and sometimes I'm like, "I don't want to deal with this. It's a pointless discussion." But we like to just talk and debate things. That happens just hanging out a lot. In fact, whenever we sit down to study in the same room together, we usually don't get much done because one of us will strike up a conversation and the next thing you know, it can be two hours later with nothing done.

- - Senior, Male

Peer relationships and extracurricular activities are very important to Wheaton students. But these contribute to an additional faculty concern regarding the student learning culture. Many faculty attribute poor performance in the classroom to the

“overstimulation” of out-of-classroom involvements. Wheaton students are achievers and tend to become extremely involved with the surplus of campus activities available to them. Yet even though these activities may detract from classroom academic performance, they do not necessarily impede student learning. Students value times of discussion with peers and extracurricular activities because the learning they crave is a learning with personal commitment - - not the detached learning typical of many classroom environments in higher education. (It should be no surprise that lecturing as a teaching method has lost popularity for the majority of students). Students who appear apathetic or unconcerned with classroom learning may in fact only be interested in what they consider alternative forms of legitimate learning. Instead of the academic life, they may give priority to learning in the social life and life of activities.

But the most influential aspect on your life, I’ve found, is the other students. The conversations you have often become very deep, being able to think through some issues with other students is one of the most productive things. There’s always people that you can talk to deeply about things you may be struggling with. Ultimately, although the seeds of thought might start in a class, the development really occurs with other students as you’re thinking through things, bouncing ideas off others, etc. That’s one of the strong points I find about Wheaton - the real ability to sharpen one another.

- - Senior, Male

While many students may look to their friends and the extracurriculum for more than just alternative forms of learning, these outlets usually serve as an escape from the pressure of academic rigor. Wheaton students have high expectations for academic achievement - - for good grades and/or for increased learning. But these efforts still demand work - - work that is considered by many to be very hard. With few exceptions, students seldom derive a sense of pleasure from their studies. So they turn to other outlets as a source of enjoyment. They do what Willimon & Naylor (1995) label as “working hard and playing hard.” Notice this characteristic in the assessment of these two male students:

I think fun helps a lot of people get through some of the academic pressure or stress that they feel now. Or maybe it even helps push away some of

their fears or concerns about where their studies are going to take them in the future. Not that everything that's fun is done as a means of escape. A lot of it's done just because it's fun. But it's probably important because a lot of it is stress relief.

- - Junior, Male

It's interesting how many people get involved in two or three IM's (intramural sports), even though that's clearly going to take away from their studies. You hear the message again and again that the thing you remember the most about college is the relationships and doing things with friends. You don't remember the academics. Because we don't even recognize the possibility of deriving pleasure from doing homework, we feel that homework is work and not fun, and fun things are pleasurable activities and doing things with friends. If there's no pleasure in it, then we just want to get it done as quickly as possible so that we can get involved in pleasurable activities, whatever they are. Extracurricular activities, like leadership positions, etc. are probably not as pleasurable as other activities, but people will be more willing to sacrifice pleasure for those.

- - Senior, Male

The focus on "playing hard" - - the attraction of pleasurable activities unrelated to academics - - raises questions again as to the level of commitment among students to learning and the academic life. During registration, students often discuss which classes are easiest - - not which are most educational. And at the end of the semester, book "buy-back" times from the college bookstore are very important times for students. While this may be a commentary on the poor (according to students) economic conditions of Wheaton students, it is also a statement about the value of books and reading for students.

Anti-intellectualism is really not dead on Wheaton's campus. Students work hard and play hard, but do they really think hard? Most of the time this could be answered in the affirmative, but there are times when the unreasonable, the uninhibited, the outrageous seem very attractive to Wheaton students. One senior male noted that at times, "Wheaton students can act like the guys in the Mountain Dew commercial - - absolutely crazy." Signs of anti-intellectualism are also reflected in student humor. Popular among students is a video production called "The Salad Years." Created by students and broadcast biweekly on the campus television station, this is a collection of random skits and candid video shots. While demonstrating many talents of students and providing an avenue for excellent experience in audio-visual production, the focus of the production is really only about mindless comedy. And students love it! To understand why such activities and

friendships are so appealing to students, it will be important to investigate the social life and life of activities of students - - two remaining areas of the dominant student culture yet to be discussed.

The Social Life

Almost every student here has fun. The phrase that gets thrown around a lot is that, "our primary calling as Christians at Wheaton College is to be students." I hear that a lot. But some people will say that their primary calling is to have fun, to hang out with friends, and to enjoy oneself.

- - Senior, Male

It's two o'clock in the morning. The majority of Smith/Traber Hall residents are sleeping. Except for a few students chatting quietly in one corner, the main floor hall lounge is empty. The night-watchman, having completed his rounds, leans back in his chair to read his literature assignment for the next day. All is calm. But suddenly, with great urgency, the stairwell door entering Traber lounge flies open, an uproar of excitement fills the air, and thirty freshmen and sophomore male students scramble through the door. Male students, up late and causing considerable clamor in the lounge, would not ordinarily cause more than a single look. What does captivate and hold the attention of onlookers, however, is the way these students are dressed! At first glance, one would think these students had been either performing in the school's orchestra or perhaps rushing to a formal party on campus - - sporting the latest in suit coat or tuxedo jacket attire. But upon closer scrutiny, one realizes that something is not right. Even though many of these men are wearing matching dress shoes and dark socks, their attire is noticeably incomplete. None are wearing pants - - choosing instead to model the latest (and preferably wackiest) style of boxer shorts.

But these male students are not dressed this way simply to act ridiculous. It is obvious they have a mission. Representing the majority of residents on their hall floor, they march together with energetic enthusiasm through the lounge corridor toward their targeted destination - - their sister floor in Smith Hall. Upon approaching the floor hallway

door, students in the front call for a cessation of the playful conduct and nervous laughs at the rear of the entourage. Unlocking the door, the gentlemen walk briskly but quietly, and locate themselves in various positions down the floor hallway. With as much silence as is possible for thirty college men, they set up the supplies brought with them and wait for the leader's cue. Once in place, the leader (usually the resident assistant) yells out a command and the silence is shattered. A "raid" has begun.

Playing whatever musical instrument they can (with little attention to musical dexterity), the male students erupt with uninhibited, obnoxious, ear-piercing noise with the sole purpose of waking all female residents on that floor. Careful to follow the standards of not entering the women's rooms, the men continue to play, pound, and yell until the female residents begin to open their room doors. Dazed and half awake, many women slip on a robe (considered by many to be a necessity for living in residence halls), and venture out into the deafening noise of the narrow hallway. Some more timid to present themselves late at night or merely exhausted shut their door and return to bed. But a refusal of their beckoning call only incites many men to try even harder until either all female residents respond, they give up in exhaustion, or the resident director awakens to calm the frenzy.

Once the initial task is accomplished, the men escort the women to the floor lounge where preplanned snacks and drinks are usually waiting. After a brief period of interaction, the leader calls for order and asks the women to be seated on the floor for a brief presentation from the men. In small groups or individually, the men stand in front with their unusual apparel and read or sing (amid the cackles and laughter from the women) various selections of "sappy" love poems or songs. The more creative or outrageous acts are met with the greatest approval. After this comical relief, the leader stands again and offers directions for some closing icebreaker games which involve more brother-sister floor interaction. When the chosen games are completed, the men offer their salutations, and exit the floor. The women, still smiling from the unexpected treat, wander back to their rooms and eventually to bed. Approximately one hour from its start, the brother floor raid of a sister floor is now complete.

Not all "raids" within residence halls are the same. Women's floors will also raid their brother floors. And the variety of types, times, and locations for each unique raid - -

ranging from very simple plans to outrageous escapades - - reflects the creativity of college students. Usually a particular theme accompanies the plans for the raid - - such as Formal Wear, Hawaiian, 60's, Elementary School, or Movie Night - - to name a few. Some raids in the past have been so noteworthy and memorable as to become a part of student culture folklore. While not necessarily popular with all students (and many faculty members), raids have persisted as a significant cultural ritual for the social interaction of students. Even though they have virtually no appeal for upper-class students, raids serve as an initiation rite into the social life of Wheaton student culture. They are an important dimension of the brother-sister floor dynamic at Wheaton and become a catalyst for the development of opposite gender relationships.

Even more basically, raids demonstrate the value that students place on the social life and the tasks of building friendships. Getting up in the middle of the night by itself is not considered fun by students, verified, for example, by the sneers and poor attitudes from students exiting the building during a late night fire alarm. It is revealing, therefore, that a large percentage of floor residents not only choose to attend a raid on their own volition, but that they do it with much enthusiasm and vigor. They want to participate because they want to build friendships - - and not only opposite sex but also same sex friendships. It is important to be a part of a group, to plan an activity together, and to have fun with friends. For many, these dynamics constitute the core of their college memories. Based on this senior's remarks, it is obvious that for some students, college friendships are the primary reason for coming to Wheaton.

I have been here to get an education, but it hasn't been primary. Primary was the friendships that I built here. I've tried to take full advantage of the things going on here on campus and integrating school work and friendships and my dating life and brought them under the authority of God. I'm more of a people oriented person. I like to learn from people and spend time with people. I never had the sense that getting grades was that important, but thought that this was four years of your life that you should experience fully - not studying 40 hours a week. It means some of your best friends are going to come out of these four years. I had this sense coming in as a freshman, but I didn't know if I could pull it off. But my friendships from freshman year have continued through the four years. . . . My priority was having friends to be accountable to and to share deep things with and have lots of fun with them.

- - Senior, Male

Thus, a third prominent characteristic of student culture at Wheaton College is a desire to build and maintain a strong social life in college. Students consider it very important to carry on relationships with their peers in such a way as to demonstrate social maturity. They want to prove to themselves and others that they can get along with people, so they concentrate on developing their interpersonal skills. From close friendships they also look to receive a sense of mutual love and support. Hearing about stories of college friendships that last a lifetime, many yearn to duplicate this experience for themselves. Idealistically they hope for those perfect friendships and anticipate a camaraderie of Christian fellowship. In practice, they take their interactions very seriously and dedicate time to fostering depth in their relationships. From freshmen orientation week on, they set out with great abandon and high expectations to establish the friendships that will last them an entire lifetime. Having been in the community for some time, this senior clearly identifies the importance of friendships among Wheaton students.

Friendship is important because students hear that your friends from college are going to be the best friends in your life. Plus there's just something about living, studying, and eating with people and always being with the same people that friendships develop on a different level than what they did in high school. You have to work through a lot more hard things because you're with each other all the time and more issues come up. I think friendships are important all over the world, but it's a big emphasis here because people believe that because Christ is the center of many of the friendships that they'll be there forever. The friendships here are different than other schools because a lot of my friends at other schools who aren't Christians have party friends who just go out and drink all the time. They're buddies, but when it comes down to it, do they really know each other? People here have friendships where they really know each other. It's based more on that than just common interests or common activities. Students really know each other here by being honest with one another and by doing things with one another besides just going out and partying - - by discussing things and doing interactive things, talking a lot in late night discussions, etc.

- - Senior, Female

In this section, I explore the dynamic contours of the social life for students at Wheaton College. Specifically, I focus on the critical role that friendships and opposite sex romantic relationships play in the student culture.

Developing Friendships: The Value of a Christian Community

Students at Wheaton College feel assured that close, genuine friendships are possible because of their assumptions about the homogeneity of a Christian institution. Such common religious commitments, many interviewees stated, provided a stable foundation for the social bonds of friendship. One student addressed this notion in his observations of the student culture.

I get the impression that above and beyond many things one might expect, relationships are really important here at school. I don't necessarily mean dating relationships, but just friendships and peer groups and those kinds of things. They seem to be the core for a lot of students' existence. You are geared to being more sensitive to building relationships here because you come in with the mindset that everyone's experience is close enough to mine to where relating to each other shouldn't be that difficult. There's kind of the assumption that everyone is Christian, that everyone has basically the same beliefs as I do, and for that matter, it shouldn't be difficult to build relationships, as opposed to coming out of a public school setting where many were kind of shunned by the "in" crowd or kind of overlooked because of their faith. I think there's kind of the assumption when they come here that things will be a lot more relaxed and easier. A lot of freshmen on my floor anticipated getting a core group of Christian friends. That was an exciting thing to look forward to.

- - Junior, Male

Along with similar religious commitments, the majority of Wheaton students, having grown up in Evangelical Christian homes, also share similar life experiences and a common cultural heritage. For this reason, many students conveyed the same feelings as this female student when she described a sense of "fit" within the Wheaton community.

I think in a lot of ways I fit in because most of us come out of similar backgrounds, of being raised in a church and the same Christian subculture, like the "Music-Machine" and stuff like that. So in that sense, probably here more than anywhere else ever again in my life, there is a feeling that we're all from the same kind of weird background. I remember what it was like to be the kid in school that spent a lot of time at church, and growing up with weird stuff like "Music-machine" and Evie, as opposed to our friends at school who had no clue about these. In that sense, most of us have had to deal with the same issues of being a person in a church and being a person at your school and home, and just trying to find where you are in between all those things.

- - Junior, Female

Having the opportunity to be on a Christian campus and share a common bond with peers affords a certain comfort zone - - a sense of relief for many students. A common

Christian bond implies that students at Wheaton better understand the feelings and perceptions of one's Evangelical Christian faith and, in turn, are more sensitive to the importance of these religious commitments and outlook on life. In short, students feel that they can go "deeper" with their Evangelical Christian friends - - and depth is something that students crave from friendships. As reported by these two female students, there is something "different" about Wheaton friendships.

The thing that sticks out the most in my mind are Christian friendships. I didn't have any Christian friends in high school. There's just not a big church population out there. So when I came here, it was the greatest thing, because there was a great support system with all the friends you can make. You can sit down and pray with your friends, but it goes deeper than that. With your non-Christian friends it's just kind of joy, love, peace, happiness. But when you're friends with a brother or sister in Christ, it's a lot deeper than that. There's meaning in life that's more than just superficiality. I have great non-Christian friends, but we're not living for the same thing. They could try to understand me, and I respect them, and they respect me, but it's just not the same. Christian friendship is everlasting. It's deeper because you're living for the Lord, not for your career, or not for getting a wife or a husband. It's something different. . . . I've had a couple friends from home visit, and they definitely have noticed that my friends here are like sisters. It's not selfish. My friend doesn't encourage me for selfish reasons to do this or that. You look at your friends and encourage them and motivate them to do something that God wants them to do.

- - Senior, Female

My friendships here on this campus compared to friendships among my friends at other campuses who aren't Christians are different. "Deeper" isn't quite the right word. But there's a common bond in Christ that allows friends here to understand certain things. I can share things with my non-Christian friends, but if I'm struggling with something my Christian friends are going to understand that, even the semantics.

- - Junior, Female

In addition to a deeper understanding, students also feel that Christian friendships offer more opportunities for nurture and support. A Christian community is perceived as less threatening. Christian students do not have to fight as hard to defend themselves and their faith. Because they share a common foundation and "look pretty much the same," Wheaton students feel very comfortable in making friends and building relationships with their peers. The Wheaton student culture is considered by many to be a friendly environment, and getting to know people initially on Wheaton's campus is a fairly easy endeavor. For the most part, there is a sense of trust that students are good people and will

demonstrate care for individuals and commitment to their “family” community. This sentiment was clearly shared by the following two respondents:

I think there's more of an overall caring here of what goes on at college. I think there's more of an attitude of not necessarily caring to the point of action but caring deep down and thinking that what goes on here matters and the people that are here matter. . . . I think Wheaton College has the potential to be a very vibrant body of people that really cares about one another and also does a lot of things for other people. There's the ability to really come together here. I don't think we do it yet, but I think we can really do it. I think the underlying care is there.

- - Senior, Male

There's probably more of a family community here than at secular campuses. Generally I would say people are supportive of each other. It's pretty easy to find friends. People are pretty willing to be accepting. There's definitely different groups, but I wouldn't say that it's necessarily as “cliquish” as other schools are. Although there may be some lack of tolerance if you're really on the fringe. Because there's so much of a homogeneous student culture in general, it's usually pretty easy to find a group of friends.

- - Senior, Male

Overall, Wheaton students feel that the community life at Wheaton College is unique. There is something “different” about the social atmosphere which allows for friendships to easily form. And students appreciate that. As many respondents made clear, students place a high value on the Christian community at Wheaton College.

I think definitely there's a sense of having a Christian community. That's important to students, and to have people around them that think the same way. Not to say there wouldn't be some debates, but everyone pretty much agrees on what is right. People may come to Wheaton for totally different reasons, but part of it is to find a community that you can find agreement and growth within common belief and support that you wouldn't find at any secular university coming in as a Christian especially. So I think that's really important to people - - a sense of a Christian community and finding a whole lot of support in that.

- - Junior, Female

I think there's a sense of community more so than other schools. Wheaton isn't as fragmented as other schools, but it's also not one big happy family. That's not realistic. But I do think there's more of a sense of community at Wheaton because there is a common bond we all share. We all go to chapel and there are certain things we agree on. We can talk about politics and we can argue because we have something to argue from. If you talk to someone who's an atheist, there's nothing you can appeal to. But with Christians you can argue issues from the Bible or from Christian principles.

- - Junior, Male

What Students Gain from Friendships: Beneficial Components of a Christian Community

Wheaton students appreciate community. They enjoy being a part of a group and feeling the strength obtained from numbers. They like to know that others share their same belief system, even if they only share limited similarities in other areas of their lives. They are open to making acquaintances with just about anyone, so they reach out for community. But behind this push for community - - behind the drive for fellowship and relationships - - is really a desire for something much deeper. Students want to have friendships that fulfill some of their basic human needs - - especially for acceptance and belonging. For many Wheaton students, acceptance and belonging are important components of the Wheaton community.

Students strive for acceptance by looking for depth in their relationships. They want to know that people “really” know who they are, and once they do, still like them. Feeling accepted involves an affirmation of one’s personhood - - a feeling that one is understood because other people in a group think, feel, and act the same way. Although many students have numerous “acquaintance” friendships, most value a community that is willing to get on a “deeper level.” This is exemplified through the following student’s remarks.

At many other schools, there’s no real sense of community. But that’s very evident here. You always see students with each other and talking with everyone. Something that goes with that is a value on friendships that are at a deeper level and not just for hanging out or doing fun things. People really do strive for intimacy, at least the people that I’ve come into contact with. People are very in tune to getting to a deeper level. People don’t necessarily like to sit at a huge table with a lot of people because the conversation becomes a bunch of people telling like old war stories from High Road (camp) or something like that, and it just gets really tiresome and you feel like nobody knows you. There’s a frustration that goes along with that because I think there’s a lot of people who feel their needs are not being met. But community is a huge value here.

- - Junior, Female

In developing depth in their friendships, students also want to know that sincerity of friendship will be reciprocated. In order to trust the acceptance of others, students want to feel a sense of commitment from their relationships. Ironically, many students feel that relationships with more variety can be stronger because they are usually based on “true” friendship, not merely on common interests or activities. Even though based within an

academic institution, friendships not initiated by academic life are probably more significant, offering proof to students that they can succeed with friendships outside of any commitments to academic pursuits. For this reason, many lasting friendships will often start within the first year and be generated from common living arrangements (such as a residence hall floor). As one senior male student put it, “Who you hook up with the first two weeks of school has so much to do with who you are when you graduate - - it’s unbelievable.” Another student stated:

Within your group of friends, the perceived need is to not really acknowledge the academic part of things. That’s why most tight knit groups of friends, who are friends for the whole four years, are friends that are made from freshmen floors - - because there’s no other real common denominator. They’re not all philosophy majors, they’re not all chemistry majors, or not all soccer players or whatever. They’ve just become friends because they’ve been put together their freshmen year. . . . With my better relationships, almost those that seem to just ignore the academic side of life seem to be stronger. My best friends this year are completely different majors. We study together, but we don’t talk about our classes. We found a way to relate to each other that didn’t have anything to do with school.

- - Junior, Male

Besides acceptance, another key component of community that students value is a sense of belonging. To achieve a sense of belonging, students strive to “fit in” - - to form an identification with a group. For example, students attempt to develop and nurture their identities by getting involved with various ministries, athletic teams, and music groups. In turn, identification with a group affects one’s involvements and accomplishments in other campus activities. A senior female touched upon the importance of “fitting in” when she said:

There’s definitely some unspoken need to “fit-in” here. In the dining hall there are certain sections where people sit and you learn that, so you have to find your niche and finding a group that you can fit-in with. That can really gear how your time at Wheaton is, depending on who you get in with from the start. That doesn’t mean you can’t switch, but there is definitely a need to be a part of a group at all times.

Students may gain a sense of belonging from their common interest groups, but as previously mentioned, a significant portion of group identification is based upon residential propinquity. Students strive to “fit in” within their given living arrangements. With the people living most closely to them, they try to develop a “home” where they can be

accepted and appreciated for who they really are, both good and bad. They yearn for a place to be themselves without having to prove anything to others. Perhaps this is why one student compared residence hall floors at Wheaton, particularly in underclass halls, to dynamics found in fraternities and sororities.

Freshman year, I was on a floor that was a great blessing. It was a really tight floor. We still talk together - - all the freshman from that year. It was close to what a fraternity would be - - we called it the brotherhood of 5-South. We always had all these things we did together. They were lots of fun. It was a real feeling of acceptance. If you're on the floor we accept you kind of feeling. It's not like they wouldn't accept people off the floor. But it was a really good way to get plugged in - - having some good guy friends. That was like my first exposure to Wheaton where I just like to stay up to 2-3 in the morning doing the typical freshman thing - - talking about things. That was just really good. I felt like I didn't have to prove myself to fit in. "We accept you." I think that in general most of the people on my floor felt that way.

- - Senior, Male

Of course, the emphasis students give to acceptance and belonging is counterbalanced by a desire to maintain one's uniqueness and individuality. Students want to be accepted for who they are and not only for their ability to emulate group norms. However, peer pressure to conform is very strong, and in the end, Wheaton students tend to value unity and familiarity over the conflict and uncertainty that individuality brings. One student spoke to this point when she said of Wheaton students:

I think feeling like they fit in is important. But I would say there's two opposing dynamics: people want to fit in but they also want to be an individual and have their own identity. Some people are so much that way that they look and act extreme. But when I walk to chapel and look at all the people in front of me, I think everyone looks pretty much the same. Everyone's wearing blue jeans and has a similar shade for a winter jacket. But yet there's definitely some cliques. It's funny to me that people feel very individualistic, but from appearance, they're not really. I would venture to say that if you talk to people they're not really as different as they say they are.

- - Junior, Female

Imperfect Friendships: The Reality of a Guarded Community

With the emphasis upon community and a friendly environment, some students naively assume that their relationships will all be positive. However, students soon learn that their expectation for a Christian community to be free from conflict is quite unrealistic.

While hungry for community, students learn quickly that despite Wheaton's homogeneity, community does not always imply unity. One respondent captured the reality of Wheaton's imperfect community in this way:

But I don't think people understand what a community is supposed to be or look like. And I don't even think I totally understand what community is, but I seek people out. I don't understand it because I know what it's supposed to look like, but I don't know if I know what it's supposed to feel like. I know it's supposed to be a gathering of people that commune together. But does it always have to feel good and just feel like we're in heaven? I'm trying to learn how to be a community and still feel not right about it and still feel like there's stuff to be done, and not feel like I have to keep protecting people from what they need to look at. And it doesn't feel all fuzzy and nice sometimes. I'm learning that in my walk with God it doesn't always feel fuzzy and nice, so why shouldn't the community reflect the relationship that I have with God? I'm not perfect in God's sight, and I don't think I can be perfect in community. And yet community is important because first of all it's human nature just to seek people out. And secondly, I think in Christian homes and environments, community is stressed because "they'll know us by our love," - - by the way we commune together. But that's a big goal to have all the time pressing down upon you.
- - Sophomore, Female

When certain students realize that a Christian community is not perfect, and when they realize that friendships involve risks of both rejection and acceptance, they are likely to be more cautious and less "open" in their development of relationships. Although they strive to meet some basic human needs of acceptance and belonging, they become less optimistic that the general student population can fulfill all their desires. Unfortunately, not getting hurt becomes a larger priority than commitment in relationships (Holtz, 1995). As a result, students keep the majority of their acquaintances and friendships on a superficial level. Though they believe the overall student culture is friendly, students often feel that many of their friendships lack transparency in that there are too many risks involved. Instead of honest disclosure, many students resort to "cover up" tactics, as evidenced by this respondent's analysis.

Here it's not easy to talk about weaknesses that you have, not so much weaknesses like having trouble doing your devotions or trouble praying all the time, but when you get particular about things. Like things that happen to you personally - - that's hard. Like during the revival, the stuff that people talked about during that. If you can sound religious and sound theological, you don't have to worry about stuff like that, almost like sins like that or those kinds of struggles aren't going to apply to you because you're dealing with something like predestination or something, so you

don't have time for something like the drinking problem my roommate has or something. I want to say it's like a cover up - - a protective layer. If someone starts digging at you, you can pull out a couple big fancy words. Because people would rather talk about things like, "well how do you see Romans 8 applying to such and such," instead of sitting down with a buddy and saying, "the last couple of weeks I've been struggling with lust and stuff." This could get into some things that you may really not want to know about, but he has no one else to turn to. And he sits down and says, "I need some accountability and I need some prayer. I need your help." I think that kind of stuff frightens most students and Christians in general. So I think that's why by sounding religious you can just kind of avoid that stuff.

- - Senior, Male

Wheaton students strive for honesty and genuineness in relationships, but processing through interpersonal adversity demands hard work. As a result, students are prone to keep many of their interpersonal contacts on a superficial level, thereby contributing to a "guarded" Christian community among students. For many, such "guardedness" is related to their understandings of the moral expectations within a Christian institution. Students who feel that they somehow violate Biblical standards are less open about their lives. Guilt intervenes, and certain things are just not discussed - - especially anything resembling or closely affiliated with sin. In order to avoid a sense of failure, students often hide much of themselves behind protective facades. One sophomore female's perspective summarized this issue well: "It is safe to say that this is an encouraging environment (if you're doing the right thing it's encouraging). It's a supportive network here, but maybe not as real or trustworthy." Another student added:

I think people talk about transparency, but they don't want to hear everything. There are some things that you cannot talk about here. You don't talk about past abuse, and you don't talk about sexual sin, or any kind of sin. Things go on here, but it's so different. I've had guys tell me that even the content of the conversations in the locker room isn't what it was from high school days. And that is a place where it could be - - all guys in a locker room who date and everything. So why that is, I don't know. But I don't know if it is always a good thing, because I think it can be suffocating for the people who are suffering through things. . . . I think I could have graduated with those people and never known about their struggles. In fact, at the Revival last year, that came up quite a bit from seniors who said, "I'm graduating and you don't know me." So in this culture it's really hard to be real and break through barriers because these are bright students who have always excelled. And I don't think they try to connect as much. . . . I don't think there's the same degree of transparency.

- - Senior, Female

Wheaton students recognize the presence of superficiality in their relationships when they realize how different openness and honesty can feel. Though they may fear the risk, when students do experience a sense of transparency among their friendships, they perceive it as a breath of fresh air - - a relief to truly feel acceptance and mercy. One student described the feelings of many students who were associated with a spiritual "revival" that greatly impacted the campus during the spring semester of 1995:

Before the revival, for me it was easy not to talk about what I struggled with or what really bothered me. I had an easier time talking with my pagan friends at home who would talk about anything because they're searching for anything and they don't really care. But here it's kind of like the Hester Prynne thing from the Scarlet Letter where you're kind of looked down upon. You just don't feel secure in saying things like, "I've been struggling with masturbation or I've been struggling with drinking" or something like that. Whereas after the revival and through the course of those five or six days where people were just letting it all hang out and showing all because everybody was. So it just made people so much closer. The friends that I have now, I'm so much closer to them where I feel comfortable saying that I struggle with whatever. So the revival was probably the most significant event for me in my four years at Wheaton. It was significant because I got to see Christianity from a different aspect. I think here you see it very intellectual and very poised and it doesn't get ruffled. Whereas at the revival, it was just so simple - - "I can't believe I used to do this stuff, I still do, help me." And I remember Dr. Dorsett was up there and he was crying. And he's a doctor and a professor here. And to see people like Dr. Litfin and Chaplain Kellough and Dennis Massaro and different people who sit in higher positions than students down there just sitting around and you didn't have to worry about going up there and saying things like, "the last couple of weeks I've been drinking like a fish and I can't take it anymore and I don't know what to do." And just to see people like that say that "I believe in Jesus and my life is in complete shambles right now." It was like relief - - like when you finally figure out what grace is about and you're like "oh man, there's not a thing I can do."

- - Senior, Male

Ulterior Motives for Friendships: Individualism within Smaller Communities

Unfortunately, this previous student's experience of transparency is probably atypical or at least sporadic for the majority of friendships among Wheaton students. Students do not take many risks with disclosure and the accompanying fear of rejection or disapproval. They worry about being able to control the perceptions of others. As a result, they attempt to solve many of their dilemmas on their own accord. Levine (1980) noted

that students sense a loss of control from continual changes - - in society, in the family, in the schools, and in the media - - which results in the perception that things are falling apart. To escape this inhospitable reality, students turn inward. When unable to control their external environment, they divert to something they can control - - themselves. Referred to as “me-ism” by Levine, students can become focused upon their own destination and what they can do for themselves. Students at Wheaton are not exempt from these individualistic tendencies. Even though they value friendships, they may have ulterior motives for how friendships best meet their individual desires and needs. Some students are highly critical of this individualistic tendency, but don’t deny its existence among Wheaton students.

When students think in terms of their future, it’s me and God and what is the Lord going to do for me. This seems to be the American individualism baptized. They don’t think in terms of what they can do in terms of joining a group of people. Students recognize that they are affected by individualism. They recognize that it’s a fault in the culture and in themselves. But very seldom is there any observable progress to change it.

- - Junior, Male

Everybody here is concerned about themselves, self-centered, how they’re doing in their spiritual life, friendships, dating life. It seems a lot of talk goes on about what’s going on in your life. You can see it in their busyness, trying to get to know everyone and excel in everything. A lot of it comes as a result of bringing in people from similar upbringing. Everyone has excelled academically and most have excelled in three or four other things. They don’t want it to be different and we want to be accepted by those around us. Our parents accepted us, pretty stable backgrounds for the most part, and we come to place by ourselves and we want to be accepted, which might be why people talk about dating so much. I think the self-focus is important to them because maybe they don’t know the depth of God’s grace, that no matter what you do you’re forgiven. None of us has been that bad, so none of us realize that we can be apart from “good” and still be loved. We don’t understand so we continue to do things the way we’ve done them.

- - Senior, Male

As students spend more time in the Wheaton student culture, they realize that personal needs cannot totally nor realistically be met by large numbers of students. Because transparent relationships take so much time and work, they focus their energies on smaller communities of people. Relationships with the larger community are viewed as artificial and shallow, but relationships with closer friends are accepted as more meaningful and represent greater opportunities for shared perspectives and common visions.

Generally, students opt for the context with more safety and certainty. Thus, smaller friendship groups form to provide an aggregate understanding of cultural mores and a means through which the needs, wants, and desires of individuals can be satisfied. Friendship groups become a collective body which reflect the personal values and attitudes of separate members - - the mass which defines the individual (Durst & Schaeffer, 1992). It is significant to note that more pervasive and distinguished friendship groups have the potential to form into their own type of subculture (discussed in Chapter Five).

Interestingly, the type of interaction most valued in these smaller communities is what students term as “hanging out.” Because they value genuineness and transparency in friendships, they look for settings where they can “be real” about themselves - - where they don’t have to “put on a show.” For students who are constantly focused on performance and excelling in the classroom, in work, and in activities, the opportunity to relax and “let one’s guard down” can be incredibly enticing. Hanging out is a chance to share company with someone without having to accomplish a task. One senior male stated simply that, “We hang out just for the interaction and to relax and to see your friends and let them know what’s going on with you. Sometimes it’s just to kill time - - it just depends.” Within the student culture, coffee houses have grown in popularity for this very reason. To many outsiders, this behavior seems rather “lazy.” But for students, hanging out is an important occasion to “be real” with someone and experience their acceptance. Rather than wasted time, hanging out represents an important time of affirmation between individuals - - a time to genuinely know and be known by another person or persons. Whether it be for big events, daily meals, or times of fun (represented by the following quotes in that order), Wheaton students express a preference for just “hanging out.”

I know that some people criticize Wheaton students because we don’t have as many big events that we organize for our fun. Maybe they’re right, but from my perspective, I think it’s more fun to just have informal times of hanging out. I think that’s exactly what gets criticized. It used to be that the Washington Banquet was a huge deal. Now they have problems getting enough people to go. But it’s more relaxing to just hang out. There’s less pressure, especially dating.

- - Junior, Female

For my lunches I like to eat long meals. There’s a group of people I don’t see anywhere else except for at lunch, so I’ll try to spend time with the same

group. We'll stay around, drink some tea, and hang out just chatting with each other. I enjoy that. For dinner, we take turns cooking dinner with four other guys from an apartment downstairs. We do this because we want to be together and have a little community thing (and learn how to cook).

- - Senior, Male

The ways people have fun here are different from how people have fun at other colleges where they see how many people can get drunk. I've enjoyed going to some parties with people and I'm sure the drinking happens here but the friends I have here don't have fun that way. People have fun here by simply going out to a movie then coming back and having a coke, pretending we're studying but not really studying - - more interpersonal relationships and just hanging out. There are some large group parties but they're usually centered around some activity - - choir, a Christian ministry, or a sports group. But we get together and make dinners and play games. I've never heard people say the friendships here or activities here are boring. People say they're having a great time. We try new recipes, throw a birthday party, and annual events like a Christmas party. It centers around food most of the time. Sometimes people go out for coffee. What's important in hanging out is probably just the talking about what's going on in your life, what happened this week, how was that exam, etc. It can also be about more significant things like family struggles, personal struggles, or how God's been working.

- - Senior, Female

Opposite-Sex Friendships: Pressures within the Community

The drive for acceptance and belonging can be satisfied through these small communities or friendship groups. However, the majority of students also acknowledge a yearning for a deeper level of intimacy - - of knowing and being known at the core of one's personhood. For the majority of students, fulfilling a "longing of the heart" is achieved through deeper levels of "knowing" (through emotional and eventual physical intimacy) in a more serious, monogamous relationship with a person of the opposite sex. Finding a life partner is a prominent desire of most students. In keeping with their Christian commitments, many students give attention to the possibilities of satisfying these desires through a marriage relationship. The result is often what one student describes as a preoccupation with ulterior motives in relationships - - a pressure to "find the right match" for themselves.

It just seems like everyone has motives. Like they're at Wheaton for certain motives, and even dating relationships have ulterior motives - - people want to get married or at least find some kind of intimacy. It's not getting to know someone just to get to know someone. People are coming in with

their own expectations and motives for doing it. After a while as you mature, I think there's a lot of upperclassmen that say that they have some opposite sex friendships which are very platonic and have been very fulfilling. But when you first come in here, everyone's scoping each other out because you hear all these stories about how, "oh, I met my husband at orientation." So for the first couple of months you're wondering, "could this be the one? Is this guy I meet and happen to talk to - is this going to be some funny story we share ten years later." So I think if someone's being nice to you, you start interpreting it like "do they want something, because I don't know if I'm ready for this. He looks like a nice guy, but I sure don't want to date him and I don't want to give him the wrong impression, so I better just back away so he doesn't get any mixed messages." So opposite sex relationships are really hard.

- - Senior, Female

The internal pressure to get married is exacerbated by perceived external expectations. Students wanting to mature and become adults realize that family roles are a significant aspect of adult life. Based on their experience with many "model families," students often feel pressure from parents and friends to initiate that strong family while in college. For as the perception goes, what better place is there to find a good Christian mate and the potential for a strong Christian home than at a Christian college? As the following quotations indicate, students fear that if they don't act while in college, they may pass up a great opportunity to be "equally yoked" with the spouse God intended for them.

I think there's a really strong family value here too. Every year there's a class film about getting married. But it's true. There's real emphasis on finding a mate that will be the one for life, maturing quickly, developing a family, raising children, etc. - - because people come from strong families. There are a lot of students here who don't, but they're surrounded by people who did come from strong families.

- - Junior, Male

I think people are afraid and think they have to find somebody here. I thought I had to find somebody here because I thought if I leave the school without a girl, that means I'm going to go into a secular society and will most likely be at a secular school, so where am I going to find a good Christian girl. There's such an attraction for girls or guys here because you can pretty much count on their past being fairly calm. At other schools, you have to wonder like where have they been, who have they been with, like how many guys has she slept with, or vice-versa with guys. And I think there's a fear there. Whereas here you can pretty much count on that most everyone struggles with going so far but most are pretty good and are still, quote-unquote virgins. So I think there's safety in that. And everybody is trying to find a mate here. I look around and see how many people have gotten engaged this semester alone and it's amazing. They're basically like, "I found somebody that's a Christian. This person makes me happy. And

we're both Christians, so it can't be bad. At least we have that. That's the one thing it says in the Bible is not to be unequally yoked." So until I dated a girl for about a year and realized that the Lord's going to decide who I'm going to marry and I'm not going to go out and find the person. Everybody's trying to find that girl because they feel like, "when am I going to be in a better situation to find Christian girls? Most likely she's here." And studies say that before you're like 21, you've met your future wife and you know her. And I think everybody's trying to act upon that.

- - Senior, Male

External pressure is also felt from the Evangelical Christian subculture. Biblical Christianity emphasizes the importance of marriage as a fulfillment of God's intention for humans to procreate, to have companionship, and to assist each other as "help-mates" (Genesis 2:18). In becoming "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), man and woman also experience, through a lifetime commitment, an understanding of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual unity. Thus marriage is an important reality of the Christian church, and members of the Evangelical subculture hear of its importance from an early age. As expressed by these two junior females, this pressure is a reality in the life of Wheaton students:

On the one hand, I think marriage is an expectation that everyone has. Yet our age group as a whole, beyond the Evangelical circles, is pushing it off. But within the Christian circle there's this view that you will get married at this age. So we're kind of caught between the two. It's okay if you leave it until later. You're not abnormal as much as you would have been twenty years ago, but on the other hand, it still feels strange, because "this is where the market is; this is where your best odds are." And I think I've felt that a lot more the longer I've been here, because there is a sense that this is the end of your opportunity. Looking at leaving here by myself and going into the world is more intimidating, and so because of that, I could see why people would want to get married.

- - Junior, Female

There is a huge emphasis on marriage and people not feeling whole until they're married. People who want to be pastors are told that pastors aren't hired unless they're married. Unless they're a youth pastor. There is pressure on people who want to be ordained. At least among girls (and this is probably not just our generation), your life kind of starts when you get married. That's your identity. That's the identity girls are taught to have. Until then you might do things and pretend you're having a career but you know it will all stop eventually.

- - Junior, Female

As an extension of the Evangelical subculture, the campus culture also promotes many hidden yet powerful messages about the importance of marriage. Numerous respondents commented about casual remarks made in chapel or from other leaders on

campus regarding the urgency of finding a mate. Additionally they identified examples of how this pressure is emulated within the student culture through many cultural sagas of students “ringing the tower bell” in Blanchard Hall when engaged or having their engagement announced in the campus student newspaper under the section entitled “Up the Tower.”

I think the whole pressure to get married is a huge thing, maybe more for women than men. By junior year girls are getting very nervous. I think that's too bad. But with that comes an emphasis on appearance. I've heard so many times at Wheaton that God isn't as happy with a girl because she doesn't look right. It's not everyone, but it is here. At a Christian college, it's not just an eating disorder, it's also “God's not happy with me.” It becomes this spiritual thing too. It invades that part of your life too. I think it has to do with the whole Evangelical subculture. I know that many campus leaders love to crack jokes about couples who are dating and really encourage that, in an unhealthy way I think. And students just make a huge deal of it. It's fun, it's happy, but it is made a big deal here - - things like up the Tower, bells ringing, in the newspaper, etc. It's just all over the place.

- - Junior, Female

The marriage thing is a big topic. It's a big joke to get engaged or whatever. But I think every student thinks about it - - they think their mate is here or they should be here. And if they're not here, where in the world are they, because these are the top of the line girls and guys, and if you can't find them here, you're not going to be able to find them. Being a senior plays a part in this. I'm dating someone now, but we just started dating, so we're not looking for too much. But the thought about marriage has crossed my mind. My friends tease me about it, and we've only been dating a month. So it's just always there. It's kind of hard to deal with sometimes. You see it with the emphasis on the Tower - - in the Wheaton Record you see who's going up the Tower. When I was a freshman and sophomore it wasn't bad. But last year it got bad, because you started to see people in the class of 1997 getting engaged, and I'm in the class of 1996. And now I'm seeing the class of 1998, and one from the class of 1999, and I'm wondering, “what in the world is going on?” Then your friends start dropping off like crazy. But I think the Tower, even though it's not anyone necessarily doing anything, is a pressure. You're always hearing the bells going off or reading about it in the Wheaton Record.

- - Senior, Male

What develops among the student culture is a “mate mentality.” Students feel that among other things, their college experience must involve the task of finding their lifetime mate. For some students, this can become an overriding factor in being a college student. It is obvious from the words of two graduating seniors that a mate mentality is pervasive within the student culture.

There's this mate mentality, that I'm going to find a mate and everyone I date is being screened as a potential mate. I think this really robs you of all the fun and enjoyment and variety of dating and having female friendships. Only recently have I begun to enjoy uncommitted friendships with girls and having a great time and not worrying about it. It doesn't mean that I'm going to marry her, it just means that we enjoy each other's company. To be able to leave it there is very reassuring, but I don't think a lot of people are able to do that here because there's such a pressure. I think it's a subconscious pressure. . . . I think in the Evangelical Christian subculture, there's a sense that people want to marry someone that has the same beliefs. So an optimistic view would say that because there's so many people here with the same beliefs, they want to find a partner here. Perhaps a more pessimistic view is that because Evangelical Christianity shuns premarital sex, and because most college students who are not in that subculture have premarital sex, the sexual pressure forces people to marry earlier. I think it's a factor, but I don't think it's the major factor. But I do think that about 75% of the Wheaton students and about 85-90% of the freshmen fall prey to what I would call the mate seeking mentality. Then the reality starts setting in around junior or senior year, and senior panic affects some with a lot of marriages happening right after college.

- - Senior, Male

Yeah, finding a mate is a big one. People are afraid that once they leave Wheaton, they won't meet a Christian mate. And I think that's sad, because I think that becomes a lot of people's concentration, and really what they have at hand here is really an awesome opportunity just to get to know fellow Christians and just have fellowship with them. I think people get caught up in finding the right person. But I don't think it's right, because we're not going to be able to contrive anything. God's sovereign, and he's going to place someone in your life. And unless it happens, we just shouldn't force it. The divorce rate of Wheaton people is just so sad. And I could have been engaged by now, but I just said, "no way." So dating life is important. The first day you walk in here you hear, "oh, you could meet your husband or wife here." It's kind of like a Christian camp ethos - - you know, kind of like go to a Christian camp and meet a great guy. So this is just an elongated Christian camp. And jokes are made in chapel and what not, but I don't think they should be. They're trying to make light of it, but it's continuing this thing that freshmen hear. So that's how it gets carried on. It seems like there's more people engaged than what there probably really is. But I think that I'm fairly typical to have these feelings and not be engaged. But I definitely think there is a senior panic factor.

- - Senior, Female

Deeper Friendships: Dating Practices in the Community

What is interesting is that with all the discussion surrounding this "mate mentality" - - with all the pressure from internal and external sources to get married - - a common perception among students is that the "dating life" around Wheaton is fairly dull. Students will talk about dating, and even complain about not dating, but little action is taken. And

yet many students end up getting married. This appears, as some students describe, to be a paradox.

I see dating as getting a lot of talk, but not a whole lot of action. I don't know why that is. Even the guys on my floor, they can talk about it a lot, even though they know it kind of rests on them to get up the guts to call a girl or to just develop those satisfying friendships or whatever. But it just doesn't seem to happen that much. And because of the rarity of relationships, the relationships that do happen can absorb a lot of pressure because everyone's kind of watching. So it's important cognitively, but you would think that you could measure that out in what people are doing. But maybe it's because people are scared or whatever, but it just doesn't happen that much.

- - Junior, Male

Girls are always complaining that guys aren't asking girls out. Guys are always complaining that there aren't good girls to ask out. But all these people are getting married. That's what I don't understand. So I think you either date someone totally seriously or most people kind of look around. But I think there's always going to be complaining about it.

- - Senior, Male

Students feel the pressure and concern about opposite sex relationships, and yet few seem to take the dating life very seriously. The answer to this paradox, however, may be related to what students distinguish or define as dating. Most students would say that the traditional sense of dating - - where a male asks a female out for an evening spent alone and usually off-campus - - is rare among Wheaton students. It is rare only because this is not the preferred style of interaction among students. Alluding to what was stated earlier, students would rather get to know someone - - including a member of the opposite sex - - by just "hanging out" with that person. This could involve small or large groups or even being alone, but the time together would be much more informal and "laid back" and focused on friendship, not romance. It is interesting to note the difference in dating styles between a daughter and mother who both attended Wheaton College.

I never dated the way some people here seem to think dating should be done. I was never into dating one person one night and someone else the next night. My mother told me some stories about how she did that, but I think that was a totally different approach to dating than what we have. Because of the intensity of the environment here, it's hard to get to know people here by dating. That's just not wise because we all live together. It's not like we can go home to our own families everyday like you can in high school. You live together, and you could literally spend 24 hours a day with another person if you really felt like it. So that makes it hard to date in that casual sort of way. So I think that's why people say the dating

life is dead here. That was never very satisfying for me anyway, because I would rather just go out with everybody and hang out. At least among my friends, the relationships that have formed are based on years of friendship of just hanging out and then something happens.

- - Senior, Female

Opportunities for interaction between the sexes are restrained on Wheaton's campus due to regulated social parameters and specific residence living restrictions regarding opposite sex visitation hours. As a result, students do not spend as much time socializing or hanging out with members of the opposite sex, and friendships remain on an artificial level with little vulnerability exposed. Students often express frustration with some of these policies.

I'm not sure there's enough interaction to de-mystify the sexes. Men and women are different, but we should appreciate those differences and be able to hang out with them and not have to worry about things like, "do I like her or does she like me." Spending significant time with anybody here means you're dating. But it shouldn't have to. Wheaton has a hard time with that, and I can understand why because it's important what we do with our bodies and our minds and with our relationships. But it's also something we have to be able to put into perspective. Sex is not the most important thing that it tends to be here.

- - Senior, Male

Student life in terms of male and female interaction is not good here. If you don't date, you don't really become that close of friends. A lot of that has to do with residence life - - open dorms, open floors. I'm convinced that vulnerability is exchanged late at night when school work is done and you're just kicking back, with the opportunity to really get to know each other deeply. And when you're a freshman, or even a sophomore without a car, you can't leave campus. And if it's cold outside, you're not going to walk to the Stupe (a student managed campus snack shop). And the Stupe isn't a very intimate, vulnerable place either. You can't go up to each other's rooms. You can hang out in the lobby, and that's it. So intimacy and vulnerability are never exchanged. And because of that, the only time that you can really get off campus or do something with a girl on a one-on-one where vulnerability can be exchanged is in a dating situation. So that's why real friendship between males and females at this college is hard to come by.

- - Senior, Male

This is why students struggle with many campus activities which seem to focus on romantic dating and not just hanging out. The popular activities seem to be the ones where students can interact on their own terms and in more casual, non-threatening ways. Students want to start a relationship more spontaneously on a friendship basis, but feel

inhibited by institutional and time restraints. The perspective of one junior male is quite revealing in this regard.

At Wheaton the level at which relationships are carried on seems to be a little more juvenile than the world's because we're only allowed to socialize on certain parameters. With those restrictions it makes some social situations a little tougher to get to know one another. The school is aware of that and they try to provide these things for the students to date and to get students to meet one another. The problem is they are all focused on a romantic level - - like the Dating Game at the Stupe or The Love Connection, Roulettes, etc. The whole nature is romantic. It's not "let's just get together and hang out." That is initiated by students. It's not the school. The school providing little opportunities for people to hang out - - that makes it more romantic or makes it appear to be more romantic. When students are left to interact on the level they choose, it is much easier to get to know someone and then date them in a casual way. But just because of the pressure of being on a small campus, when you do ask somebody out, it comes across as a romantic gesture. A scenario is this: If there is a freshman girl that I want to ask out, or was interested in and I didn't have any classes with her, I had no real way to bump into her, and I wanted to meet her, I would have to go up to her and introduce myself or find some way to get in her path. Automatically she is going to think that this guy out of the blue introduced himself to me. So then it automatically comes across in a romantic sort of way. You start your relationship off on a crazy level. Because of that it makes it harder and people are more hesitant to go out on that limb. Especially if I'm attracted to her which is the natural response, if you don't know her, physically you would just pick them out. You could end up not liking them. It's not as easy to withdraw from. It's not just kind of a bump-in. If there were dancing, you could meet someone in a casual atmosphere and then you can just go in and out. It's not a big chore. It is harder at Wheaton to date. Some of the restrictions that we have in the statement of responsibility are the mostly widely used means to meet people. I'm not advocating the drinking and going to bars, but dancing and things like that. It is very easy just to bump around, get face to face, swap names, say hi and bye. You generally meet people like that. With the dorm policies on open floors, it makes it harder for things to happen spontaneously. When there is an open floor, in that time you have to go up and meet people. Everything is on a set time schedule, The Love Connection, The Dating Game, Roulettes. It's not spontaneous. If there weren't quite as many restrictions you may open up for some negative things to happen, but there would be more freedom to mill around and meet people. Students are more spontaneous than planned. You may see a girl and be attracted to her, but I don't know how you would plan on meeting her. Having a friend and getting to know them over a period of time, where you're not physically attracted to them at first (you may be attracted to their personality or something like that), that usually takes a lot more time to develop. So dating in college is spontaneous because you're only here for four years, and you don't have the time schedule where you can get to know somebody and develop this deep meaningful relationship because people leave, you go to different classes, and you live in different places each year. So you just don't get the chance to establish very many deep

relationships, especially with the opposite sex.

- - Junior, Male

Students get frustrated with traditional dating practices because of the serious implications attached. Casual dating is a misnomer for Wheaton students. The common perception is that dating is closely correlated with marriage. But this can be very intimidating for students who like to take major commitments slowly. Students who want to find that perfect mate and develop a solid Christian marriage are cautious with dating because of its serious implications and will take their time to make sure they "find the right one first."

It's more serious here and in Christian colleges because marriage is more on your mind. It's not so casual here - - to just be with people and maybe have sex. . . . Some people, like myself, just went out with different people more casually. I've never had a boyfriend here. But as you get older, it gets more serious, because people just assume that as you get closer to graduation, you're thinking about marriage or have the idea in the back of your mind.

- - Senior, Female

Dating in the sense that a guy goes out on a date with a girl on one night and out with another girl the next night - - there's hardly any of that. But I don't know if that's negative. I don't know if there's any other way that it could work at a small college like this. There's only two thousand students here, and you're going to get to know a ton of people. So there's no playing. There are a few players - - in fact last year people called me a player because I went out on several dates with people, which was like five girls the whole year. But none of my friends go on dates. A lot of my guy friends are scared. It seems like they're just waiting for something to happen where they'll meet a girl who is a friend and then they'll end up being a girlfriend - - that's what they expect. There's a good chance at Wheaton that that might happen. So they never really date. No one goes out much on Friday nights. If something does happen, we all go together. I don't know if it's shyness or whether it comes back to that push to find a mate, so if you date someone, you're going to end up being committed to them and marrying them. So you have to be sure to find the right one first - - it's as if you've got one shot at it.

- - Junior, Male

Students crave intimacy, but they want to be able to trust that the intimacy is real. They fear the pain of rejection, so before they will pledge a level of intimacy, they will make every effort to ensure that the acceptance is genuine. Thus, serious dating is bypassed for less formal settings of truly transparent interaction or, in other words, traditional dating is abandoned for times of just hanging out.

The irony is that because students fear rejection, they almost inevitably suffer a form of rejection that comes from only casual relationships. The problem perpetuates itself when students, fearful to risk any commitments in dating, never sense a deeper level of intimacy, which, in turn, accentuates their fear of making a commitment. Furthermore, because dating is regarded as rare, when and if students do take the risk, more significance is attributed to the act. Consequently, when the seriousness intensifies, students grow more cautious, and the vicious cycle continues. It is interesting how this perspective is recognized by both male and female students.

You always hear the "Wheaton women - - Wheaton man" thing. The stereotype is that the Wheaton woman wants to get married, wants the Wheaton man to be handsome, going to be a doctor, perfect Christian, going to be the perfect daddy because she is all those things in a female. But the men are intimidated by that and there's just not a lot of casual dating. So when you do get asked out you either think "Oh, wow, neat person, he wants to marry me. Great!" The women get very intense and kind of latch on to the men. Or, if somebody asks you out you think, "Ah, he wants to marry me, but I don't think he's all of those things," and you have nothing to do with him. So it's just a little bit odd.

- - Senior, Female

On the one hand they complain about guys not asking them out; on the other hand if a guy asks her out, then that's a really serious thing, because it's so rare. They both work together - - the girl's mentality that this has to be serious is probably in part because they never happen. On the other hand, it's also probably the cause of it never happening.

- - Junior, Male

Serious Relationships: The Struggle with Premarital Sexual Activity in Wheaton's Community

The dating life at Wheaton in the traditional sense probably is "dead" for many students. The same cannot be said of students who commit to a dating relationship; such relationships are taken very seriously. So-called "serious couples" give careful consideration to the possibilities of marriage and the meaning of a lifetime commitment. One result is that they often struggle in "going too far" with their intimacy. For Evangelical Christian students, this struggle is most dramatically felt in their physical relationships. Following Biblical standards, Wheaton students are committed in principle to sexual

abstinence outside of marriage - - something quite unusual for many students their age. One male student suggests that, "with the opposite sex, compared to a state school, there's an obvious distinction. There's actually many people here who are committed to not having sex outside of marriage - - which anymore these days compared to everyone else is really odd." Yet despite this commitment, the struggle to maintain this standard is very difficult for many students. One can sense the agony felt by students for maintaining sexual abstinence in the words of this senior male:

For myself, I can handle drinking and saying no to my peers. But when I get alone with a girl in a room, and know that I could take it further, it's very difficult. I don't know if it's a personal struggle, or if it's typical of everyone else. I don't know if it's more of a struggle because it's done in private. There are so many times that I rationalize it in my head. I've been praying about it and having other people pray about it - - in a manner of seconds being so vulnerable with someone. Man, it happens. I've been good in the sense that I haven't had sex, but then you go the whole extent of trying to define what sex is. Is it just the act of intercourse, or is it everything that leads up to it? Obviously it's the act of intercourse, so everything else is fair game. But if you sit down and had a Christian talk with anybody, I guarantee that most people would say, "I think it should stop at kissing." I've talked to a lot of people and I think that's consensus that kissing is where it should end because everything else just leads downhill. I've dated a lot of girls at Wheaton, and I struggle with it, but I have a sense of morality too. I won't go too far, but at the same time as you get more and more comfortable with somebody, it's easier and easier to go right up to the last step. I don't know why, maybe because you're on your own. Afterwards I can think, "why did I just do that." For me I think my struggle is when my own self tries to take over and control whereas letting the Lord control and lead me. First of all, getting alone with a girl when nobody is around is bad news. I guarantee it's going to happen - - people are not going to get up and run. I don't know how many do it, but I would say that in my crazy, party group of friends, probably ten to twenty percent have gone all the way with intercourse and are presently doing it. Some people did it in the past, but I know that if their girlfriends would say they could, then they would. And once you go there, you can't go back. With the girl I dated, it wasn't like you just messed around and kissed. That's not enough anymore. You've got to go to where you left off last time. I also know of some people who are convicted about it, but don't really think about it. They would do it on a whim almost. Even if they don't know the girl. I know some guys that meet girls downtown and end up having sex with them. And I've seen one night things happen here. I think that becomes more of a personal thing, so it's not really discussed as much.

- - Senior, Male

The reality is that the sexual activity of Wheaton students is probably greater than what most students or staff would suspect. Making a distinction between a serious

commitment and necessary boundaries is not an easy task for many students - - especially for students who are driven to excel and achieve in all aspects of their lives. Although not often discussed within Wheaton's student culture, many students acknowledge being aware of sexual activity, particularly among their peers involved in committed relationships. For example, two juniors reported that:

One of the things that is probably more rampant than anything is the sexual activity, especially among juniors and seniors. Couples who have been dating for two years - - I know so many people who have basically told me that they're sexually active. And it's just one after another. More promiscuous sex doesn't happen that much, except for at an occasional party or something. But it mostly happens with people who have been dating for a while. Even though there's a prohibition against it, it's almost as though students are resigned to it - - "we're going to do it, so . . ." They don't really justify it, but they figure that since they are committed to this person, it's more okay. The thing with young Christians is that there is always that feeling of guilt, and along with it comes the issue of birth control. To use a condom is to admit that you're intending to do it. This is what happened to me. I never wanted to use one, because to me it would be admitting that I was giving in, when before I used it I could say, "I didn't want to do that, it was such an accident." So you have the couples that are just finally resigned to using birth control to try to be more responsible. But with that responsibility goes the resignation. They do think about it, but they just feel like they can't meet up to a high expectation. Eventually the temptation gets too strong, and then it happens four or five times, and they know that the next time they're alone together, they're going to do it. So they just decide to be responsible. So it's not so much a rejection of the mandate as much as saying that they just can't keep it. And maybe with smoking or drinking or one of the lesser evils, it may just be like, "this is dumb, I should be able to do it." But with sex, there's always a feeling of guilt.

- - Junior, Male

I think on this campus there is far more sexual activity than people know about or want to admit, not as much as at a secular campus, but more than people want to admit goes on at a Christian school. It tends to be junior/senior year. There tends to be a lot of young marriages that come out of it. This tends to contribute to Wheaton's high divorce rate. It tends to occur in really serious boyfriend/girlfriend relationships - - "we're going to get married anyway, it's not a big deal." I would say there's a high percentage of older students who have had intercourse but not in the same way at a secular university. Between juniors and seniors I would estimate that about sixty percent have had intercourse, or maybe just fifty percent. That would include high school too. I'm not trying to justify it, but I think it's hard in communities that don't talk about sex very much and only sanctions sex within marriage because people end up trapped with these desires and it's confusing.

- - Junior, Female

The issue of sex in dating relationships hinders the potential for transparent communication within the Wheaton community. Students struggle with their hormones, but don't feel that they have adequate outlets to discuss an issue that is forbidden by Christian standards. As a result, they often resort to "cover up" tactics and attempt to deny or hide their feelings from the community and even from each other. One student acknowledged this communication break-down as a problem within the Christian community.

Sex is not discussed because we don't know how. Growing up within the Christian culture, that's just not something that's done. There are all kinds of degrees and situations. Like we talk about these things, but sex doesn't get talked about in church. And if it does, it's just like, "don't do it." And people don't talk about sexual abuse in the church, unless it occurs, and then it tries to deal with it and a lot of times it gets covered up. So that's not a healthy way of dealing with that.

- - Junior, Female

Not being able to adequately address the issue of sex in relationships creates one more barrier to effective communication and interaction between the sexes. Students are guarded about what they say for fear of sounding "unchristian." Guarded speech implies less speech, and less speech implies fewer opportunities for further understanding of each other. As a result, more clearly defined and rigid roles are established. This only further complicates students' efforts for intimacy and interaction on campus. One student summarized these complications between male/female relationships at Wheaton in the following way:

I think there's a bigger division between male and female understandings here than on a secular campus. I think men and women are much more congenial and just together as friends, not necessarily intimate relationships. But on other campuses, intimate relationships are more accepted. I think there's a fear of sexuality here. People are scared to admit that they're sexual beings or that it's there - - that there's a tension. So they don't deal with it and try to ignore it. I'm not advocating co-ed living arrangements by any means, but just because we're separated, a lot of times we don't know how to deal with each other. We're just not used to spending that much time with each other or understanding each other. And I also think here there are very defined roles of how men and women are supposed to react toward each other. I don't know that that's true on other campuses, because there's many more outspoken feminists and stuff like that - - the roles are less defined so there's more space to move and connect. I feel very stifled and smothered with these defined roles. I don't necessarily think that way. I don't have a problem asking a man out if I would like to

spend time with him. I don't think that men should carry the burden of rejection. The women on campus complain about the men not taking initiative, but my feeling is that if you're interested, you can and should say something.

- - Sophomore, Female

During the first week of school, the college's orientation committee sponsors an "All-School Communion" service on the evening before classes. Although attendance is not required, the majority of the student body fills up the auditorium of Edman Chapel. The occasion is usually a festive time when returning students greet their friends and get caught up with their stories from the summer break. But it is also an important time to welcome the new freshmen class of students, and Wheaton College has a unique tradition for accomplishing that purpose. Every year freshmen students are asked to participate in a choir for the communion service. Surprisingly, a large percentage of the freshmen class does participate, filling the risers on the chapel stage. Then, at the appropriate time in the service after the freshmen class is introduced, the entire student body in the audience stands to their feet to welcome the new students. Even more remarkable is the amount of time students remain standing, yelling out boisterous cheers and clapping with enthusiastic applause. The atmosphere is inspiring and is a stark contrast to the stereotypical stories of freshmen hazing or initiation rites. Indeed, many freshmen students report warm feelings from the evening, as if welcomed into a family.

This outcome is exactly what students intend. Through this initial greeting to freshmen, students hope to convey the image of a warm, friendly campus. Students want to perceive themselves in a positive light, and will put on their best "face" when introducing themselves to any newcomers. And these efforts make a difference. Since the expectation of friendliness is so pervasive within Wheaton's student culture, the students themselves try to act friendly. The social belief that students are friendly is translated into student behaviors that really are quite friendly.

However, because this expectation for friendliness is so high, students also act

friendly at times out of a sense of obligation. There is positive peer pressure at Wheaton to be polite, so students work hard to retain a positive, friendly image. This realization, however, raises a difficult question. Are students truly friendly, or do they merely act friendly in order to conform to student expectations? The answer is probably mixed. Durst and Schaeffer (1992) point out that as with any cultural system, some students are true believers and act accordingly, some are hypocrites and merely play a role, and some are non-conformists and act as they wish. In reality, Wheaton students reflect this same range of responses to social expectations within the student culture.

For the most part, Wheaton students crave intimate friendships and a sense of belonging. They want to be “real” with others and honestly accepted for who they are as individuals. Unfortunately, their expectations are often too unrealistic. They often set themselves up for disappointment by accepting an idealistic image of Wheaton as a friendly community. It doesn’t take long for some to feel the pain of broken relationships and hurt feelings between friends. Consequently, many students retreat to the safety of their own world and attempt to mend their wounds through individualistic pursuits. Rather than change their expectations about friendships, they strive to further protect themselves from additional harm.

This is an interesting paradox on Wheaton’s campus. On the one hand, Wheaton students legitimately desire close friendships. They crave commitment. But on the other hand, the fear of hurt or disappointment proves to be an ominous risk. Although they want to consider themselves as friendly, in the end, they tend to be quite guarded or cautious in their relational commitments. Many students labeled the Wheaton community as a very friendly place, and yet admitted that it takes a long time to feel safe with their vulnerabilities. Stated differently, Wheaton students want to take, but they are afraid to give (Durst and Schaeffer, 1992). They want to find a deep sense of security in their friendships, and yet do not allow these friendships a very wide margin of error. As a source of comfort, students may turn to other outlets to build their identity - - outlets that tie them firmly into the life of activities for students.

The Life of Activities

So much of your identity comes from what you do outside of classes. Because your extracurricular activities and relationships are so much a part of what you do, that's what ends up being the larger influence on who one is and what one focuses on.

- - Senior, Male

I've fit in because I got involved. I think it's something they recruit for - - for Wheaton students they'll look to see what type of extracurricular stuff they did in high school. And so the first week, they've got the club tables out, then they've got the Christian Service Council ministries, to try to get you involved and plugged in somewhere.

- - Junior, Male

On any other day, dismissal from chapel would merely involve a leisurely stroll from the steps of Edman chapel back to the center of campus and the rest of the day's activities. Students, in casual conversations with friends, would walk along the recently renovated outdoor plaza that winds a path past the library, academic buildings, and student center. However, on this warm, blustery, autumn morning, something is noticeably different. The sea of students spilling out from the chapel doors is engulfed by two walls of tables lining a corridor through which students must walk. Around these forty-five tables are a variety of different decorations, posters, and brochures. Behind each table are various student leaders beckoning the crowd to give heed to their best sales pitch. Most importantly, however, is what rests upon each table. It's "Club Sign Up Day" at Wheaton, and all the hype and advertisements, all the sights and sounds, fixate upon one meaningful piece of paper secured to each table - - a sign-up list. It's a list of signatures which symbolizes the future lifeline of any campus club or organization. It represents potential student membership and subsequent allocation of funding. Without student interest and involvement, many clubs and organizations on Wheaton's campus would simply not survive.

One can feel the sense of urgency amid the pleas for consideration, the calls for commitment, and the petitions for student signatures. As if to prey upon the innocence and naivete of first year students, many student leaders offer whatever gimmicks or treats imaginable for enticing students to their tables. Creativity is encouraged. Mu Kappa, an organization for missionary kids, displays a colorful exhibit of international flags.

Archaeology Club members are dressed in hard hats and tool belts. The Jonathan Blanchard Society, an organization named after Wheaton College's first president for the purpose of promoting involvement in issues of social justice, mimics a scene from the life of a homeless person. And College Union goes all out by renting a dunk tank, allowing students to take free shots at submerging favorite campus professors or leaders in water. All of this is done to attract students to their cause. Student leaders are fully aware that chances for involvement are significantly reduced for any student who fails to sign up on their mailing list that day.

Yet despite this sense of urgency, Club Sign Up Day is really not all that dramatic. Student creativity is more or less expected of college students, and decorations on many tables are anything but extravagant. There is no yelling or bantering between tables, and the sales pitches are essentially only harmless requests. Students passing by do not receive any threats or feel any extraordinary pressure to get involved. All things considered, the stroll through "table alley" is essentially a tame experience. This could also be said for the "Ministry Sign Up Day" that happens a week earlier in much the same fashion.

The reason student leaders don't resort to more aggressive tactics is not because they are timid or complacent about their cause - - they just don't sense the need for such efforts. Student participation in clubs and organizations is already quite high, so heavy handed approaches to manipulate students seem unnecessary. Many students, particularly first year students, browse through the tables, read signs, ask questions, and then sign their name. In fact, the majority of the clubs and organizations establish a large portion of their membership on this day. Therefore, they can afford to be more relaxed - - they can wait for students to come to them. And students do come. This is most clearly exemplified by the number of clubs, organizations, music groups, and ministry teams represented on Wheaton's campus. For the 1996-1997 academic school year, eighty different student led groups were officially registered, including the tae kwon do club, pep band, gross anatomy club, French club, ice hockey, earthkeepers, orientation, and student missionary project - - to name only a few. Being a relatively small institution, this plethora of extracurricular activities is really quite impressive and attests to the high level of participation within Wheaton's student population.

For the majority of Wheaton students, holding office or becoming involved with a campus club or organization is one more indication of student success and maturity. It demonstrates that one is competent enough to handle and manipulate people and organizations. Thus, in keeping with Becker's (1963) categorizations of dominant student culture traits, a fourth prevailing characteristic of Wheaton College students is a desire to be involved with the life of campus activities. A large proportion of Wheaton students have membership in at least one (and often more than one) organization outside of their living group and unrelated to the classroom or their workplace. In addition, many students hold (or have held) one or more significant leadership positions in these campus organizations. Students may choose to get involved with campus activities for different reasons, but virtually all Wheaton students are interested in and strive for some level of success and achievement in extracurricular leadership opportunities. This section will explore characteristics of involvement for Wheaton College students. Specifically, it will investigate external and internal motivating forces for high levels of achievement among Wheaton students. It will also discuss students' awareness and concern for over-involvement and yet their continued tendency toward high levels of commitment - - with the exception of political involvements.

Extensive Involvement: External and Internal Motivating Forces

In perspective, it's not really surprising that so many students at Wheaton are heavily involved in campus activities because there are a variety of factors that cultivate high levels of student motivation. Some of these motivating forces are external to the student and can be attributed to a supportive, resourceful learning environment. Other contributing factors are related to the internal drive of students themselves. For many students, high achievement has been a part of their entire life, so the desire to get involved with numerous activities is nothing new or unusual. Thus, both external and internal motivating forces prompt many students to get involved and to excel in their commitments.

Regarding external factors, Wheaton's campus environment is very conducive to student participation. There are plenty of resources and support systems offered by the institution. Students have easy access to campus advisors, sources of funding, usage of

facilities, and abundant examples of established student organizations. Students are also not encumbered with the menial tasks of daily living - - such as food preparation or housing maintenance. Health care is readily available on campus, and students have ample opportunities and space for refreshing leisure activities. And even though many students depend on employment for extra income, only a small minority of students work more than part-time hours. With few distractions, students have more time and energy for extracurricular activities. Although these conditions are not drastically different from most selective, liberal arts college campuses, the combination of supportive resources and excellent facilities create a very comfortable context for increased involvement among students.

Along with support, the campus climate also offers its share of stimulation. A significant part of the campus milieu is the general assumption that students will be busy and be committed to many different aspects of college life. What can be well-intended messages of affirmation are often interpreted by students as dutiful expectations for performance.

The motto "For Christ and His Kingdom," and the phrase "to whom much is given much is required," and "you're the cream of the crop" - - all these little messages get sent. It's like, "what are you going to do with being sent to a great institution, and your parents probably have a lot of money, so you really owe something back. It would be selfish to just take and take and take the rest of your life." And so even if it isn't Biblically based, it becomes a kind of peer pressure to do more.

- - Senior, Female

To only be involved in one dimension of college is considered by many students a cop-out and a narrow outlook on one's personal development. The pressure to get involved is pervasive throughout the community, coming from fellow students as much as from the faculty and administration. While students may complain about being extremely busy, they often readily accept the expectation to remain involved and will try their best to never appear lazy or complacent. The following students' comments demonstrate how these assumptions are often detected:

The emphasis for involvement even comes more from the students than the administration. They tend to be harder critics. . . You get a lot of evaluations, just in subtle ways, just comparing what someone might be doing in a semester. And to only be taking classes is really considered a

cop-out. There's so much more here to do. It's not legitimate to just be a student.

- - Senior, Female

There's something about laziness that's just the taboo word around our school. Everybody has to be involved and committed, and if you're not, you're looked down upon. People notice it. So over-activity is big. People say to be really active helps avoid temptation. Boredom leads to temptation. I believe that's true, but the amount of activities and over-commitment at this school is unbelievable.

- - Junior, Male

Although a strong work ethic is evident within the Wheaton's environment, the press for high levels of student involvement is not merely predicated upon external pressures from the campus climate. Students are often driven by internal forces within themselves. The type of students matriculating at Wheaton display an internal drive and passion for getting involved. Similar to their academic pursuits, the majority of students set high standards of achievement in many aspects of their lives - - including extracurricular activities. The intensity for performing well in the classroom is extended to their ambitions for leadership positions outside of the classroom. In comparing himself to his friends at other colleges, one junior male distinguished what for him was a noticeable difference about Wheaton students:

I've been impressed with how driven or how ambitious Wheaton students are - - the passion with which they pursue everything, in contrast to the general apathy and disengagement that I've seen in so many of my other college friends as they've moved away from high school. Wheaton students just engage in everything - - relationships, academics, spirituality. . . A lot of really impressive things happen at Wheaton. Things get done through ministries, and there's rarely any problem with getting volunteers. People are jumping at the chance to be involved.

Much of this drive within students is related to their upbringing. For many, to be a high achiever and involved in many activities is nothing different from what they've done their entire life. Many of their families prodded them to become involved in numerous types of activities to the point where achievement was not only expected but became ingrained as a part of their personality. At Wheaton, this tendency for achievement, is further reinforced among a group of peers with similar ambitions.

Most of the people here all their lives have been leaders, academically, and in their churches. So they all seem to have a similar character. That's part

of the reason why everyone is so busy and so driven. If you weren't when you got here, then you become that way. I had a laid-back leadership type, but I picked up a lot of those other things from being around people here.

- - Junior, Female

Moreover, because Wheaton College has highly selective admissions standards, most students believe that their involvement and achievement in a broad range of activities was a primary consideration in their acceptance to the institution. Consequently, when contemplating employment or educational opportunities in the future, Wheaton students believe that they must maintain this same level of activity and performance while in college. As this student attests, patterns for overachievement established in high school typically remain unaltered in the college experience.

Activity is something that seems important to Wheaton students - - the amount to which one's time is used. Students are gung-ho about filling up their schedules as much as they can. They get excited about opportunities - - service opportunities or just even fun. I think it's important for several reasons. Part of it is just the drive that's been pushing them since high school. High school is the place where you can be involved in anything anywhere and as much as you want. Part of that is because of the motivation that that can have an effect on where you get accepted to college. So you come in with that mentality. I know I came in with the freshman mentality that I need to do this and this and this because that's what I did in high school.

- - Junior, Male

Students who desire to be involved with campus activities are often motivated by what Green (1989) reports as "portfolio building behavior" - - assembling a list of skills, contacts, experiences, and credentials which make students more marketable to graduate schools or in the job market. In a competitive world, selling oneself is more difficult, and students no longer believe that they can get by with just an education and a diploma. Many express anxiety about a future career. As one graduating senior put it, students feel that "in the market today, you need to work a lot longer hours and be a lot better at things to give to your family what your family gave to you." Students share a degree of pessimism about future opportunities, and feel that they must either develop their "portfolio" as a demonstration of competence in various areas or, as evidenced by the following student's remarks, strive for something which seems more easily obtained (i.e. missions):

I think that there is a lot of anxiety. Chapel speakers even remind us that we are not going to be able to have this "A" standard of living that our parents

had. Our parents have done some great things often probably because they have had the resources to. They came out of the 60's and had a lot of drive and visions easily obtained and easily achieved for a lot of us. Now it seems harder. Missions is one world where that might not be because it's still pretty easy to become a missionary. Sometimes I feel like I should just become a missionary because you can look like you're doing great things pretty quickly.

- - Junior, Female

In attempting to build one's personal "portfolio," it's not enough for students to simply be involved in activities - - students also feel that they must excel in those activities. A large percentage of students tend to over-extend themselves because they believe that recognition and approval is based heavily upon performance. It is no surprise that the campus counseling center is often offering programs related to the unhealthy outcomes of perfectionistic tendencies among students. After being inundated with external and internal pressures, students develop high expectations for achievement. However, with so many other high achievers at the institution, students struggle to assert themselves in what they feel to be a very competitive environment.

There's so many high achievers here, people have to compare. You see success as being the best here, for having gone to the "Harvard of Evangelical schools." Especially where I'm at, I feel it a lot. The professors want to put out people to make Wheaton proud, to get published. I see a lot of networking. A lot of kids were top in their class and they're trying to keep that. When you're told you're good enough, you tend to believe it even if you're not anymore. The Wheaton culture is a lot of people who are very good at what they do and when you put them together, it gets even worse.

- - Junior, Female

As a result of this competitive environment, students readily acknowledge a desire not only to get involved, but also a constant struggle to be the best. The following two seniors were not reluctant to admit the prevalence of this tendency, even for themselves.

There's a tension to be the best at everything, or at least at what they're recognized to be good at. Last year there was a tension for me to be the best Resident Assistant. To the football player, it's a tension to be the best. And this goes for any group. Within every group there's a leader who is the best, and whoever is the best ends up on top. So there's a tension within individuals that they don't always want to be the best but feel like they have to to show these other people that they are. So there's an internal tension.

- - Senior, Male

Frankly, coming in, I wanted to be the best - - to be not even the best I

could be but just the best in general. It was interesting, because coming in my first year, I got knocked off my feet. But Wheaton has allowed me to excel and nurture that, so that's been good. But it's also taught me that I'm not going to be the best and I can't be perfect at everything.

- - Senior, Female

Over-Involvement: Concerns for Boundaries in Campus Activities

After extended immersion in the culture of Wheaton College, many students (particularly upper-class students) recognize the dangers associated with a drive for achievement. Yet as the previous respondent testified, learning to deal with the problem of perfectionism is often a difficult lesson to encounter - - it "knocks many off their feet." Students struggle to decipher what is perceived as a mixed message within the Wheaton College milieu. On one hand, they are encouraged to guard against "burn-out" and over-commitment with numerous activities. If anything, the concern among many faculty and staff is that students are over-stimulated by over-involvement in the surplus of campus activities (Hagen, 1995). Even students acknowledge this tendency, as one student explained:

I do think that the institution has acknowledged that there's a problem with busyness on this campus, that people are over-committed and under-nurtured. We spread ourselves so thin that we're not really growing or learning, we're just burning out. We hear that message in chapel and in classes and from residence life. I think there's a definite concern for the students here that we do so much. The college seeks to provide opportunities for the student to get involved, but I think the students seek to be kings and queens of their domains. My freshman year I had several involvements, and my sophomore year I doubled them, and it really killed me. I was doing six extracurricular activities at once. I never knew that my life could be so stressful, and I had never been like that before in my life. I think busyness is a problem for students, and it's a combination of things that people want to have more fun and more success and more Christian commitment. And the being and the doing get confused a lot. We want to be a certain way, so we do a certain thing. But it becomes counter-productive.

- - Senior, Male

Yet on the other hand, Wheaton students also encounter the assumption that a large percentage of learning happens outside of the classroom. This assumption only propels students to become even more involved in extracurricular opportunities. For the most part, what registers with students is a pressure from faculty, administration, and other students

to do more and more and be the best in everything. One can clearly sense this sentiment from the comments of this student:

They also, especially the faculty, push this busyness thing. They'll say, "don't get over-involved," but then they're the same people who assign busy work and ask you to run for president of this or that and ask you to be a Teacher's Assistant and things like that. They're the same people who ask you to do research for them while you're doing applications for graduate schools. So they really perpetuate the busy thing as well as the tension to be the best. That's reinforced by faculty and administration every day. They say, "you're the cream of the crop," "Wheaton's the Harvard Evangelical school of the Midwest," "you guys are the best there is - - you're well-rounded academically as well as spiritually, and other schools don't have that," "Wheaton College has such a great reputation around the world, and you're lucky to be a part of such a fine institution." The message is said over and over again and it's what students hear.

- - Senior, Male

Because of these expectations, many students feel that in order to survive, they must develop stronger patterns of self-discipline. A clear example of this is reflected in students' emphasis on personal time management. Many students contend that time is a rare commodity for them. Consequently, even time spent "hanging out," although very informal and unstructured, is often scheduled into a student's busy day. As confirmed by the following student remarks, students find that a date book planner is a necessary component of a Wheaton College education.

It seems like Wheaton students are very committed to a lot of different things. I had never used a date book before I came to Wheaton, and then it's like you can't survive without one. That was a real shock to me, because I tend to be a laid-back kind of person. It's been good discipline, but sometimes I'm surprised by myself.

- - Junior, Female

Another phenomenon that I think is strange about Wheaton is that people set up meal dates with their day-timers. When I was a freshman I used to hang out in the Stupe a lot, and I used to read books for fun in my free time. And it always amused me that these people would whip out their day-timers and set up meal times and it just seemed very unsponspontaneous. And now I do the same thing myself. Certain days I meet with certain people on a weekly schedule. I hardly ever have any spontaneous lunches.

- - Senior, Female

Students may strive to find better ways to manage their time, but they also respond to the external and internal pressures for involvement by changing or adapting some of their expectations. Although many may maintain high levels of commitment to various campus

activities for all four years of their college experience, some reevaluate their motives for being involved.

My freshman year I knew I wanted to tutor this one kid in the inner city, he'd graduate, and he'd say for years and years that he's a CEO in a company because of this person who came and tutored him. I have tutored the same kid for three years, he is graduating, but it's been three years of going down and most of the time he doesn't have homework. For the first two years we didn't talk very much. He's this big black kid who lives in the inner city and I'm this short white female who comes from suburban, Evangelical America. There is a big gap there. The rewards have been few and slow to come. But I came to a point where I realized that there is a reason why the Lord has me there which may be to humble me and show me that service is not a glorified thing a lot of times.

- - Junior, Female

In addition to reevaluating their motives, students may also adapt their expectations by concentrating on only one particular area of specialty or interest. But as this respondent suggests, even this adaptation may not include a change in their time commitment.

I figured out really quickly that I couldn't do everything, but that was after a year of really being over-committed. And I think I've made the journey along with other people from my class of really being over-committed as a freshman to finding a couple of things to narrow in on. But that doesn't mean less time at all. In some ways, it just means giving more of yourself just to one thing.

- - Junior, Male

Thus, despite improvements in personal time management and alterations in their expectations for performance, the majority of Wheaton students remain heavily involved. The following student's account offers a vivid depiction of the struggle students face. Students feel the pressure to be involved and to excel at their commitments. They also learn about the dangers of perfectionism and the need for developing a healthy perspective on their college pursuits. But while their attitudes and understanding of involvement may change, their actions often do not. They may recognize the challenges and concerns surrounding a competitive environment, but in the end, few do little to overcome the drive to "produce."

There's a lot of pressure to be excellent in everything. It's not just one sided focus on one area like academics. It's everything. We've been told so much that we're the cream of the crop that we sort of believe it, and we feel that we have to live up to that. Some people get confused about the whole importance of being excellent. I live in a house with seven other women, and we're all very different. But this whole idea of excellence is

very big for each of us. It's been very good to talk about that we're not perfect, that we can't do it all or do it right all the time. I think some people rebel against it, and so there's this idea that you spend your time either trying to be as good as you can possibly be at something, at one of those areas, and you spend the rest of your time trying to prove that it's okay that you're not perfect at everything else. So I'm horrendously over-committed and run around with very little sleep. So the other thing is to be busy and to be always doing something. My friends who go to other schools are not nearly as busy as I am, and they don't study nearly the time that I do or that my friends do. So that's the whole ethos of what goes on here. This year I'm over-committed because I didn't think very clearly at the end of last year about what I could really do and how hard my schedule was going to be this year. I'm one of those people that gets in over my head. I think a lot of things became really important to me last year - - like Concert Choir, and I'm president of College Republicans, which although it's a dormant organization this year has still caused some trauma in my life. I just didn't think about the fact that I would have to study, too. I got used to doing these things all the time. But a lot of that is also because it's important to me to be good at things, and I guess by being in leadership, it proves that I am. It's kind of fluctuated my four years from being in over my head academically and being over-committed with extracurricular things. A lot of it has also come because I am a double major, plus I've taken a lot of music classes. So I tend to not really over-commit as much as overextend and overestimate my time commitments and just get really busy. And perhaps busy isn't the right word. It's to produce, and that's how you show that you're producing. Especially by the time you're a senior, you know about how much work it takes to get everything done and to be sane, and you look at people who have time to watch TV in the middle of the day, and you think "are you not taking enough classes? How is it that you have so much more time than I do." I think that that's how you show that you're fulfilling the ethos of the community is by being busy. You're either writing a paper or organizing something or applying to graduate school or doing this and that. And you always have more to do than you have time to do it. I think that characterizes the way not only that we see our lives, but I think that we think that they should be, because that's how we show that we're really worth our salt.

- - Senior, Female

The Exception to the Rule: Lack of Student Involvement in Political Activities at Wheaton College

For the amount of emphasis placed upon campus involvement, it is noteworthy that most students in this study reported feelings of apathy regarding political issues, political activism, and national politics. An article in the campus newspaper entitled "Beating, but just barely: The political pulse of the college" (Powell, 1996) observed that even in a presidential election year, many students seem quite disinterested in American politics.

Outward political signs on campus - - such as bumper stickers, buttons and signs, political rhetoric, and active campaigning - - seem to be nearly nonexistent. According to this article, this is a recent change within the student culture. Just four years ago, both the College Democrats and the College Republicans were official campus clubs and were actively involved in their respective campaigns - - going so far as to sponsor a campus debate between members of both clubs. Presently, College Democrats no longer exists as an official club, and College Republicans are only slowly coming back from extinction.

Powell (1996) explored possible reasons for this apparent apathy among current students, but he concluded with only speculative assumptions. He noted that for some, the reaction of students to current political issues was a statement of a larger societal malady - - what one professor termed as an "aesthetic of cynicism." For others, the lack of student interest was related to the caliber of candidates running. One student bluntly stated that, "this is a dud election - - I'm not excited about either candidate" (Powell). Still others, ironically enough, attributed student disregard for politics to the amount of time spent in other campus involvements. Students found it difficult to stay informed with political issues in the midst of classes, work, and campus activities. One student leader who struggled against the disbanding of College Democrats criticized students, saying:

The student body is so fricking busy. The "studiers" are studying, the ministry people are out ministering, the slackards are slacking. So politics is not something that's high on everyone's priorities. The College Republicans, even though they have a larger pool to draw from, have meetings that are as poorly attended as the College Democrats. Actually, two years ago the College Democrats were a larger group, probably because Democrats feel persecuted on this campus so they have to come together with people who are like them.

- - Senior, Male

Busy schedules, lack of candidate appeal, and national trends of apathy all contribute to student complacency regarding political involvement. But what Powell did not sufficiently address in his article was perhaps a more fundamental assumption underlying the issue of student involvement. Students choose to get involved in areas where they think they can have the most significant impact. In this sense, they are very economical with their commitments. The difference for many is that they are less confident in larger, abstract political entities and more certain of their own personal arena of

influence. What was stated in a previous section about student individualism applies in this context. Students who perceive larger societal problems as an indication that “things are falling apart in our world” feel less capable of influencing or changing those problems. When unable to control their external environment, students divert to something they can control - - themselves and their individual worlds.

And this generation of students has good reason to be less optimistic. These students have grown up in a time of high divorce rates and general familial instability (Holtz, 1995). They have witnessed corruption and irresponsibility among many national political figures. They have also grown up amidst headlines of fallen televangelists and church leaders. It is no wonder, therefore, that trust in authority figures is low, and cynicism of anything organized, such as the church or political parties, is high. This generation of students is no longer shocked when politicians or church leaders fall, they’ve come to expect it (Tapia, 1994). These realities raise many uncertainties in the minds of students, causing many to question and doubt who and what to believe. One author has referred to today’s young adults as the “dis-” generation with regard to politics - - they are “disenchanted, dissatisfied, disenfranchised, disgruntled, disillusioned, disconnected, disgusted, and frighteningly distrustful” (Cohen, 1993, p. 296). A Wheaton student expressed this same political cynicism and pessimism within a campus newspaper editorial (Clariborne, November 1, 1996):

Society is far too complex for politics. Our political forms are exhausted and practically nonexistent. Nothing is left, and this nothing is increasingly aggressive, totalitarian and omnipresent. The empty political institution serves only the interests of those in power. Perhaps, in a democracy (where each has a voice), voting would work better. There must be a creation of new institutions on the grass-roots level.

Apprehensive of political, cultural, and economic conditions, many students search for whatever stability they can find in personal well-being. But political retreat among students is not simply a recourse to callousness and greed. Apathy is perhaps a misplaced label for apolitical students. They may be disillusioned with national political structures and feel powerless in making any significant impact upon society, but students don’t merely retreat into their own catacombs of indifference. Instead, their methods of survival teach them to adapt by what they know to be the best way possible - - by what Loeb (1994)

refers to as “working from within.” Students do not lose hope that they can impact society, but only defer social commitments until some future indefinite time when they can “get someplace to really make a difference.” For this stage of life, they acquiesce to finding meaning in their private lives, but work to develop skills, prestige, and wealth which will help them acquire a “voice” in the public realm. Thus, in “working from within,” students choose to focus upon their individual small communities because of the pragmatic implications these groups carry for personal welfare and meaning. One student identified this tendency as a “breaking up” or separation of the student dichotomies into distinct sub-groups.

I think there's dichotomies at both ends of the student culture. We used to have more clashes, but now it's just like there's a breaking up. It's like, “let's not fight anymore, let's just split up.” And now you've got different cultures. There's a lot of different groups that you'll see break off together. It's almost like an AA meeting - - where you come together for the reason of melding your circumstances and feeling like you have company. . . . There are political splits, and those people section themselves off. But we don't have a lot of debates on campus anymore. We don't have like public forums. All the discussion happens on a personal level - - which is good because you can have a lot of change there. But we don't have a lot of public clashings. My freshman year, even though that was an election year, had a number of different debates. We don't seem to have that anymore.

- - Senior, Male

Within these smaller communities, students find the security and significance that they desire - - they find homogeneity of purpose and goals. When students surround themselves with few threats and a cohesive environment, this only further forestalls any motivation for political involvement. One junior female, in a defeated tone, suggested that “students don't get involved in politics because they are comfortable with what they have. They don't feel any needs and like the status quo.” This invokes a tendency among students to express less interest in national political considerations and more attention to local concerns which they feel have more immediate impact upon their individual pursuits. Wheaton students in this study seldom vocalized concerns over larger civic issues unless these concerns affected their sense of personal morality or individual religious beliefs. One student aptly summarized the political commitments of her Wheaton peers in this way:

I think political stance can be important, that you should have the “right” views on issues. I think there's a basic assumption that everybody agrees

with things like abortion should be illegal, that Republicans should be in the White House - - so very basic, Christian, "Focus-on-the-Family" type of issues. It's strange to me that in the one sense these issues are important, but in another sense politics is completely removed. Like I'm not a very political person, but it seems to me that not many people get involved in the political races going on. There's not much publicity, there's not much talk about what should be done in the White House, etc. I've always been one to reap those sorts of things from people around me, because I don't care about politics enough to go find out myself. I don't watch television, so I know nothing about it, and I think that reflects the fact that it's not talked about at all around campus. Wheaton students shy away from being activists at all. Maybe when it comes to issues like abortion they are, but not otherwise. That is a lot different from what I see at like University of Vermont where they did things like a big sit-in to stop the student shuttle because it caused too much pollution. Here, everybody ignores the fact that we have a recycling bin in the College Post Office and they don't care where they throw their trash. So I think that's strange considering current trends in the younger community to be really socially aware. It's like Wheaton is another world. We're in this spiritual mecca that certain things are important and other things are "worldly" concerns. Although it's cool to care about recycling and stuff like that, and I think some people do, still I don't know why there's not much initiative to do anything - - even with spiritual issues, unless it's an organized movement like the Revival. Afterwards it just sort of dies. Maybe that's a characteristic of Generation "X" and not just Wheaton.

- - Senior, Female

Popular characterizations of today's American college students would label this generation as apathetic and lazy. This label does not appear to fit Wheaton College students. A review of the college's list of student activities would suggest that for such a small campus, Wheaton students are anything but apathetic. They choose to get involved in a plethora of physical, social, religious, and even academic outlets. As a selective institution, Wheaton College tends to attract students who have been high achievers all their lives. Coming to college is just one more chance for them to prove their abilities through various activities. However, at a selective institution, the stakes are also heightened. Students feel that they must work that much harder to prove themselves when surrounded by other talented students. Thus, the majority of Wheaton students tend to be busy, driven, hard-working, over-committed high achievers. To live up to their identity,

Wheaton students feel that they must not only get involved, but that they must also excel. They feel a strong compulsion to be good in not just one activity, but everything they do.

Some recognize or experience the dangers of over-involvement and perfectionism, and typically resort to any number of assorted survival methods - - some healthy and some unhealthy. Yet even these survival techniques do little to eliminate the individualistic focus of Wheaton students. In the end, their uncertainties about future economic conditions and their expectations for high achievement keep many striving for high individual aspirations. They attempt to build their "portfolios" (Green, 1989). In a sense, they strive to find solutions now. They have a hard time with delayed gratification because they have a more immediate desire to find meaning for their lives. In essence, a drive for achievement is really a desire for meaning. Activities that bring meaning to their lives now - - these are pursued with passion. Areas where students feel little sense of control or derive only limited meaning are ignored (such as political involvements). Consequently, students make meaning in their own private worlds or small communities. They often use their activities to develop an identity and a support community, thus accentuating the importance of student subcultures on Wheaton's campus.

CHAPTER V

WHEATON COLLEGE STUDENT SUBCULTURES

One way that I was naive coming in was an expectation of just general community, unity and camaraderie. I didn't ever expect to have to deal with some of these subculture issues. It became almost the focus of my experience in learning how those have clashed and divided a community that I envisioned as cohesive and unified.

- - Junior, Male

One of the most dreaded developmental tasks for the first year college student is a daily activity taken for granted by the majority of students and staff - - eating in the campus dining commons. Anyone who has ever been a college freshman can vividly remember that "moment" in the cafeteria when, after selecting various food items and drinks through a buffet line, one stood with food tray in hand and assessed seating options across a wide expanse of tables, chairs, and people scurrying everywhere. Such is the freshman phobia of finding friends. In virtually every society and culture, the significance of a meal is related to more than just physical sustenance. It is also about social and emotional sustenance - - communion and fellowship with significant others for the purpose of bonding and sharing lives together. First year students know this. They know how desirable it is to eat a meal in a place of comfort surrounded by people who share similar values, attitudes, and perspectives. They understand the importance of mealtime for one's personal development. Thus, standing with a tray of food and looking for a place to sit is no small quandary; in fact, it is often an experience of great anxiety for many first year students.

But what the first year student sees and what the upper-class student envisions are probably two different perspectives. Glancing over the array of small and large wooden tables dispersed around the large dining area of Anderson Commons, a first year student would observe a mass of similar looking students situated in small groups, apparently in no

particular order. For them, selection of a seat seems only to be based upon random placements of individuals as seats become available. However, the same view from the perspective of an upper-class student would reveal something quite different. This student would recognize a more clearly defined landscape of distinct student subgroups and cliques. Similar to the distribution of different countries on a world map, a typical meal at Anderson Commons reflects a geographical distribution of different student groups represented within the Wheaton College student culture. Immediately next to the serving line (and closest to the food) are a number of larger tables inhabited by members of the football team. A few tables removed from them is a collection of students typically flaunting unusual hair styles and energetic behavior - - the swim team. Next to the fireplace are a number of students associated with theater. A table of African-American students is often situated in a remote corner of the cafeteria. In a side eating room often reserved for special meetings or large group parties is a quiet section that is home to many “loners” or students wanting to do homework. Centrally located under the warm sunlight of the high cafeteria ceiling skylights are the socially active students who tend to intermingle between groups. Next to the tray return area are bar tables and stools - - a popular place for many “alternative” students. All these areas, while not designated by visible boundaries, are established territorial locations for many different types of student groups. A first year student would not recognize these boundaries, but any student familiar with Wheaton’s student culture would be able to easily identify a familiar, preferential place to eat. To be sure, any upper-class student could point out the various student subcultures at Wheaton College by casually surveying Anderson Commons.

In many ways, Wheaton College students do appear uniform. As a religious institution that requires a personal statement of faith, Wheaton students reflect a strong commitment to spiritual beliefs and the religious life. As a highly selective institution, Wheaton students tend to be very academically driven. And this drive to excel affects their involvements in campus activities and interpersonal relationships. Wheaton students reveal similar dominant trends in how they approach the college experience of religion, academics, social interactions, and campus activities. This has led many outsiders to perceive Wheaton students monolithically - - as pious, conservative, clean-cut, narrow-

minded fundamentalists (Hunter and Hammond, 1984; Johnson, 1974). Realistically, these stereotypes are characteristic of only a handful of students. Insiders within the institution recognize much greater diversity. Wheaton students view themselves as unique individuals with many different skills, ideologies, and lifestyles. What may appear homogeneous from the perspective of an outsider may in reality be seen as heterogeneous by an insider (Magolda, 1994).

There is no denying that in some regards Wheaton students are recognizably different from the average American student. Contemporary studies reveal that the moral values of Evangelical Christian college students vary drastically from those of their counterparts on secular campuses (Addleman, 1988; Hunter, 1987). In this sense, there is some degree of homogeneity among Wheaton students. Yet, similar to their peers on secular campuses, Wheaton students also reflect the variety of distinctive differences found within American youth culture.

The clearest indication of these differences is depicted in the diversity of student typologies and subcultures represented on Wheaton's campus. As with students at other institutions, Wheaton students have formed their own subgroups which reflect different values and perspectives related to the nature and purpose of a college education. According to student respondents, three predominant student typologies are represented on Wheaton's campus, each reflecting dominant patterns of student life. The first, a "college life" type, focuses on typical collegiate extracurricular activities, such as athletics, student leadership positions, music groups, and student publications. The second, a "Christian service" type, gives priority to Christian commitment and Christian ministry opportunities. And the third type, the "Counterculture" group, reacts against the conservative fundamentalist theology and the moral prohibitions of the institution.

Three other student typologies, albeit less predominant, also exist on Wheaton's campus. Students associated with an "academic" type choose to focus less on campus activities and more on strictly academic matters. Interestingly, this academic type was not singled out by student respondents, most likely because an academic focus is so pervasive on campus (interspersed across student types and subcultures) that students could not readily identify an isolated "academic" group of their peers. Another less predominant

type, the “conservatory” type, consists of students enrolled in the college’s music conservatory. These students spend considerable time together in the same campus building, thereby creating shared perspectives of their unique college experience. However, the conservatory type of students was not addressed in this study because these students participate in this group as fulfillment of degree requirements. Their involvement in the conservatory is contingent upon their enrollment in a specific academic program, not upon their own individual choice. Besides, many conservatory students also chose to participate in other student groups and subcultures on campus. Last, a third type of students who feel excluded from these typologies exist as “marginalized” students on the periphery of campus life.

While many other miscellaneous groups of students could be distinguished on Wheaton’s campus, these six student typologies were most readily identified by students in this study. Although students typically aligned themselves with one particular type, many participated simultaneously in activities associated with different student groups. That said, for the purpose of clarifying group distinctions, in this chapter each of the three major student typologies identified above - - college life, Christian service, and counter-cultural - - along with a fourth less predominant type, that of marginalized students, will be treated as idealized types of students.⁵

The presence of explicit student typologies underscores the fact that Wheaton’s student culture is not homogeneous. Moreover, the list of student typologies specified by student respondents at Wheaton mirrors other classifications of college student typologies and subcultures. For instance, Horowitz’s (1987) historical analysis and typological classification of “college men,” “outsiders,” and “college rebels” match closely with Wheaton’s dominant typologies of “college life,” “Christian service,” and “counter-cultural” students. Clark and Trow’s (1966) seminal study of student typologies identified four dominant student “subcultures”: 1) academic, 2) collegiate, 3) vocational, and 4) nonconformist. Once again, Wheaton’s student typologies share similarities with these delineations. In addition, a documentary study on the fundamentalist culture of Wheaton College from 1919 to 1965 (Hamilton, 1994) revealed almost identical student

⁵ For a discussion of idealized types, see Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993, p. 134.

classifications. Although limiting his discussion to only one chapter on four student subcultures, Hamilton's portrayal lends credibility to this study and demonstrates the strong continuity and potency of these subcultures over an extended period of time.

Chapter Four discussed many of the "similarities" evident among students in the dominant student culture of Wheaton College. The purpose of this chapter is to outline various "differences" among Wheaton students by investigating four of the aforementioned student types on campus. Such an investigation requires at the onset a clear distinction between student typologies and student subcultures. According to Bolton and Kammeyer (1972), a subculture is:

a normative-value system held by some group of persons who are in persisting interaction, who transmit the norms and values to newcomers by some communicational process and who exercise some sort of social control to ensure conformity to the norms. Furthermore, the normative-value system of such a group must differ from the normative-value system of the larger, the parent or the dominant society (pp. 381-382).

In contrast, a typology acts as a heuristic device for categorizing unique characteristics about cohort groups of students - - such as personality, interests, values, and behavior. Accordingly, a typology only describes types of students; it doesn't describe subcultures as defined by Bolton and Kammeyer (1972). For example, students categorized in Clark and Trow's (1966) well-known description of student "subcultures" do not necessarily interact persistently, have a communicational process for transmitting norms, nor exert social control over each other. For this reason, Bolton and Kammeyer argued that Clark and Trow's categorizations described role orientations of students rather than subcultures. This chapter will attempt to decipher both distinctions. By investigating a few distinct student subcultures on Wheaton's campus, a discussion of general typological characteristics of different student groups will be addressed.

How will this be accomplished? Within any predominant "type" of student group it is normative to discern a number of smaller, clearly defined student subcultures. With this in mind, in describing four of the major student typologies on campus - - campus life, Christian service, counter-cultural, and marginalized - - a vignette of a representative subculture for each typology of students will be presented. Thus, for the "Christian service" typology of students, a subculture of ministry leaders from the World Christian

Fellowship (WCF) campus ministry will be analyzed. For the “campus life” typology of students, attention will be given to an athletic subculture of football players. For the typology of “Counterculture” students, a subculture of students associated with a campus band will be investigated. Finally, for the type of students considered to be “marginalized” on Wheaton’s campus, an examination of an African-American campus organization (the William Osborne Society) will be discussed.

After each subculture vignette, attention will then be given to characteristics of the representative typology of students through an investigation of distinctive group values and behaviors. The descriptions mentioned for each typology are not intended to be an exhaustive portrayal of each group. Rather, this chapter will focus upon those values and behaviors that were most frequently mentioned by respondents in the study - - both from those who identified closely with a group and also respondents who did not.

The Christian Service Student Type at Wheaton College

World Christian Fellowship: A Christian Service Subculture

On the edge of campus sits one of the oldest buildings associated with Wheaton College - - Pierce Chapel. This building was once used as the primary meeting place for all-school gatherings (such as daily chapel), but the college’s expansion has long since outgrown the capacities of this small, cozy auditorium. Replaced by a much larger and more modern Edman Chapel across the street, Pierce Chapel is now utilized for only occasional small gatherings of various campus activities. With little use and limited renovations, the old building with creaky floors, antique wooden pews, and outdated theater style seating in the balcony, sits vacant for most of the week - - with the exception of Sunday night. On this night during the school year, the building comes to life. At 7:30 p.m. (after scheduled times of most local church Sunday evening services), the building’s tranquility is transformed into a festive, energetic, and crowded atmosphere as fun-loving, enthusiastic college students dressed in casual sweatshirts and blue jeans amble into the auditorium. Waiting on the auditorium stage in anticipation of this student congregation is

a group of student leaders designated as a “worship team.” Situated behind a drum set, numerous electric and acoustic guitars, a synthesizer, microphones, and two large speakers directed out to the clamorous audience, this worship team flashes lyrics upon a large screen and leads the assembly in the first words of an upbeat chorus. Before long, the auditorium is electric with loud music, clapping and raising of hands, and students swaying or dancing in place while singing words (often memorized) to their favorite choruses. The stage is set for another rousing celebration of Wheaton College’s increasingly popular World Christian Fellowship.

World Christian Fellowship (WCF) is a student organization at Wheaton College existing for the purpose of challenging students to consider and explore their role in evangelistic outreach to the world. With a focus on Christian service and missionary work, WCF consists of prayer groups, small support groups, occasional retreats and, most significantly, the weekly Sunday evening celebration service. During this service, students typically worship, sing, and pray together (approximately 30 to 40 minutes), listen to a student-picked speaker or panel address a topic of Christian concern (approximately 45 minutes), and then conclude with more singing and a time of prayer or benediction.

With this schedule, it would appear that a WCF service is no different from the college’s morning chapel services. Both have singing, prayer, and some type of a presentation or speaker. However, only a short visit in either context would quickly reveal notable distinctions between the two. One obvious distinction would be the location and time of the meetings. WCF takes place in an older building during evening hours when students are more relaxed and not coming directly from a formal classroom experience. Another would be the contrasting informality of WCF. Students appear more casual - - in dress and in behavior. One “worship team” leader compared the differences by saying:

Chapel for me is just so stiff. I have a hard time in chapel just because I’m not into the “Brady bunch” chapel with everything so polished and smoothed over. It just doesn’t seem very real to me. In WCF we just kind of throw it together - - we plan out the nights, but we’re laid back about the way that we let it roll on. We’re just trying to be ourselves. That’s why I’ve always liked WCF because the people I see on stage are the people I see walking around campus. In WCF I can show my gross sides, but I would never feel comfortable to do that in chapel.

- - Junior, Male

An additional distinction between WCF and chapel is that WCF is a student-generated activity from start to finish. With the exception of a few faculty and staff members, parents, or visitors from the local community, older adults are seldom present. Central to its operation is a group of student leaders who form the WCF cabinet. Nominated by a student-led ministry board known as the Christian Service Council, the cabinet consists of a chairperson, a secretary, a prayer coordinator, a person responsible for publicity, a person responsible for special programs, and three team worship leaders. As with extracurricular activities at most American colleges, Wheaton's administration maintains some level of accountability with the WCF cabinet (and other student ministry groups) by providing a staff advisor from the Office of Christian Outreach. However, even though the WCF chairperson regularly meets with this advisor, the initiative and direction for WCF activities come almost entirely from the WCF cabinet. Thus, students are attracted to WCF because they feel a degree of ownership for what happens - - they can "do things the way we want them to be done." The WCF cabinet, attuned to student interests and perceptions, attempts to provide a distinctive style of worship that is attractive to many students.

Another distinction between chapel and WCF, quite naturally, then, is a different style or atmosphere for worship. Electric guitars and drums replace the reverent sounds of a pipe organ. Praise choruses replace hymns. Lively skits replace monologue readings. And sermons are shortened or substituted for more interactive types of presentations. The WCF cabinet, in planning for their Sunday services, attempt to offer a more contemporary, charismatic, worship experience. But the motivation behind this intent is more than just an appeal to the popular music or entertainment choices for this generation of students. The WCF cabinet, in providing an alternative form of worship, strives to reach students on their levels and grant what one cabinet member refers to as "real" worship:

I think we're reaching "Generation X" where they want to be reached. "Generation X" does not like a fluffy gospel. They say, "Tell me the truth, don't water it down, and then let me deal with the consequences of it. If I want to throw it out, I'll throw it out. But don't try to persuade me to believe it." So we have messages that are very hard and very real and students are responding to that. I also think our generation has caught on to the concept of worship. When that word is mentioned, students flock. I

think the worship has been very intense this year and very vibrant. And I think students are drawn to a message that is real and centered on worship. I think WCF attracts students within Generation X who take their faith seriously, and are looking to cultivate their relationship with the Lord.

- - Senior, Male

The desire for a “real” faith is the crowning centerpiece of the WCF experience. Cabinet members and participants alike express a passionate desire to “grow closer to God” and “understand his presence” more in their lives. This desire is significant for a generation of students who have been abandoned - - who have encountered higher divorce rates in families, broken promises by public officials, and more relativistic responses to pressing questions. One author suggests that these painful “core experiences,” attributed to a lack of “true family,” have left a “deep emotional emptiness” for many students (Crouch, 1996). To fill this emptiness, many students of this generation turn to addictive behaviors such as eating disorders, sexual addictions, drug abuse, alcoholism, or compulsive spending. Yet driving these compulsions is an underlying craving to be loved. Students want to experience a substantive relationship of love - - something that is “real” and not fake. They yearn for stability in a world that is making less sense to them.

Students are attracted to WCF because it addresses an answer to their emptiness - - faith in God. And yet this “answer” provided by WCF is significant as much for its delivery as for its content. Students are not as interested in an abstract, intellectual discussion regarding faith in God (as experienced by most students in traditional church services). Students want to experience God, not just talk about him. They want something different from the experience of yet another classroom lecture. For this reason, the WCF cabinet, either consciously or subconsciously, focuses considerable attention upon a personal identification with a personal being. Students long for a personal experience and feeling of God’s love. One popular song repeats the chorus, “One thing I ask, one thing I desire . . . is to see you (Lord), is to see you.” In response to this plea, WCF places considerable attention upon the work of the Holy Spirit, for this is the agent of God’s gracious, filling presence. As Crouch (1996) suggests, an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit provides an answer to the “emptiness” felt by students. The Holy Spirit fills the void with the continual presence of God and his love. Thus, throughout a typical WCF service,

sentimental words of hope and comfort offered through song or testimony, times of prayer during or after the service, and special attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit provide a sense of encouragement and support to many in personal turmoil.

For many students on Wheaton's campus, WCF has become an important community of fellowship - - a place to feel "true family." It is no wonder that many students often substitute WCF for their church experience. It is also no surprise that attendance at WCF has exploded! According to records kept by Wheaton College's Office of Christian Outreach, average attendance at WCF has grown from under a hundred students in the early 1980's to over a thousand students in 1996. Pierce Chapel is often filled to its 1200 seat capacity.

This marks yet another meaningful distinction between WCF and chapel - - voluntary attendance. Students are required to attend chapel services, and many willingly comply. But a WCF service conveys a different "feel" in that all the students choose to be there. They come expecting to receive something. In the words of one cabinet member, students "go to seek God." In perspective, attracting approximately half of the Wheaton College student population under no compulsion on a Sunday evening when homework and class projects are looming is a remarkable accomplishment. WCF is a noteworthy phenomenon at Wheaton's campus.

It was the setting of a WCF service that led to a week-long "revival" experience for the Wheaton College community during the Spring semester of 1995. During one service, two students from a visiting college offered testimonies of an unusual experience of revival on their campus, and challenged the Wheaton students to do the same. After the service, two microphones were opened in the aisles for students who wanted to ask questions or make comments. What happened was unexpected. Students began pouring out of their seats to offer public words of confession, praise, or rededication to God. Amazingly, the service lasted until 6:00 a.m., at which time students were encouraged to reconvene at 9:30 the following evening. Students came back that evening in even larger numbers, and the process continued. Campus officials, sensing an unusual experience, moved to have the meetings on subsequent evenings in a larger auditorium at College Church (conveniently located next to Wheaton's campus). The meetings continued each evening for a week,

starting at 9:30 p.m. and lasting into the early hours of the morning. The week culminated in a Thursday evening service of over 1,800 people.⁶

To a large degree, ramifications of this revival are still felt on Wheaton's campus and especially within the WCF services. The popularity of WCF has expanded to reach all types of student subcultures at Wheaton because many different types of students come looking for a unique and meaningful religious experience. In fact, even WCF cabinet members are aware that many students are coming more for the contemporary worship experience than for the focus on world missions.

While not dismissing the importance of worship in the lives of students, members of the WCF cabinet are not content with only this goal. Their desire for intimacy with God leads many of them to make a deeper commitment for full-time Christian service in some capacity. Their desire for students attending WCF is to instill this same passion for Christian service. Thus, worship as a component of a WCF service is not a distraction to their desired focus on world missions. Instead, worship is perceived as a motivation for Christian service. Notice how closely worship and missions are linked together by one WCF cabinet member.

Worship is a lifestyle, it doesn't just stop with music. Before I was involved with WCF, I was drawn by the worship. I came because I didn't necessarily like what I got in church on Sunday morning, so I went to WCF on Sunday nights. I think that's what draws students to WCF. But I think we're really teaching them this year that a lot of that worship is a result of a closeness with God - - our relationship with God is what should spur us on to missions or our ministry. We get them there to worship and then we get them to focus on world missions.

- - Junior, Female

Characteristics of the Christian-Service Student Type

The WCF Cabinet reflects a type of student group on Wheaton's campus interested in some form of Christian service. As mentioned in Chapter Four, a large percentage of students choose to attend Wheaton primarily because of its Christian orientation/affiliation (Astin et al., 1995). But within that group of students, a subgroup of students choose Wheaton as a means of developing their Christian faith in preparation for some type of

⁶ For a more thorough discussion of this event, see Beougher and Dorsett (1995) Accounts of a campus revival: Wheaton College 1995.

Christian service or ministry. Whether or not they decide to pursue an occupation in Christian service after college, these students take their religious commitments very seriously by devoting time and energy to Christian outreach. In other words, they take their devotion to God one step further by acting out their faith in efforts of evangelism, teaching, loving, and giving. For example, in addition to WCF, these students frequently involve themselves in summer mission opportunities (Student Missionary Project, National City Ministries, and Youth Hostel Ministry), the Missions in Focus conference, or a host of other ministry opportunities under the jurisdiction of the student-led Christian Service Council (including weekly service in correctional facilities, children's clubs, local churches, tutoring ministries, hospitals, and other outreach ministries). Even though many students involved in Christian ministries do not persistently interact to form a subculture, they do share many of the same perspectives and concerns that distinguishes them as a subgroup on Wheaton's campus. Accordingly, they can be identified by the various distinctive values and behaviors they share as a cohort group of students.

Distinctive Values. The most prominent value shared by this group is a relationship with the Christian God. They hold a strong belief in God and his revelation in the Bible. Because they believe God to be an all-powerful being that created the universe, they possess a high degree of reverence and even fear of him. Knowing of his love, however, they also strive to draw closer to him in a personal relationship. Understanding and experiencing a relationship with an infinite being is no small task, but this group demonstrates great fervency for making this happen. Above any other life pursuits, they express a desire to first be "seeking God." In their life decisions, they strive to understand how to please God with their choices. As one respondent notes, success for this group is based upon this priority to God first.

As Christians I believe we should have a different view of success. The world speaks in terms of success as to what you accomplish. I think as Christians we need to speak in terms of faithfulness to what God wants us to do. Where we are most successful as Christians is being faithful to God, and sometimes those things overlap, but sometimes they don't. So I think we struggle with that as a community, because we're getting two messages. The way I'm speaking of it here is success as defined by the non-Christian community of financial success and family success - - having a four or five

person family in a nice home in the suburbs with plenty of money to buy three cars; really just a lot like what our parents have. So to maintain that comfortable lifestyle is important. There's nothing wrong with that as long as that's subservient to Christ's calling on our lives. I think there can be a conflict there, especially as people get older here at Wheaton and start looking out at the world, there's a tension to either be successful in the eyes of the world at large or to be faithful to what God wants. In a lot of people's lives, those are pulling at each other and causes a lot of stress.

- - Senior, Male

For many in this group, being "subservient to Christ's call" means that they must occasionally sacrifice their desires (which they claim can be tainted by sin) in favor of God's desires. Thus, many speak of "denying themselves" in order to "do God's will." Many are skeptical (and at times even a bit paranoid) of their own inclinations, and choose self-abasement as a means of humbly acknowledging their own sin and need of God's intervention and direction. As articulated by one respondent, this "letting go" is considered the first step to true spiritual development:

For me, spiritual growth really involves letting go of my desire to control and manipulate the course of my own life through my own actions and decisions and really trust in God to take care of me. So spirituality for me is moving toward a process in which I can wake up every day and completely release the course of the day to the Lord and just consecrate it to him and everyday to wake up with the mentality that I am here to follow him and trust him and allow him to work through me. So spiritual growth for me personally is kind of that release and also an embracing of the reality of the Holy Spirit in my life.

- - Junior, Male

A denial of self and earthly pleasures is made easier by a focus on heaven and the after-life. With the belief in a future eternal state in heaven, more ephemeral "earthly affairs" seem less important. However, because they sense a pressure to pursue "those things which last for an eternity," students in the Christian service type also display a "separatist" tendency. In the words of one student critic, they are often "too heavenly minded to be any earthly good." In other words, many of the students are often criticized for not allowing themselves to appreciate or understand the creation that God has given this side of heaven. As one student put it:

I have problems with a lot of Wheaton people in the sense that for them it's all Christianity and no society or culture. I think Christians have to guard themselves in the world, and we're in the world. But all they do is study and read their Bible. They won't have anything to do with anything outside

of that. They don't have anything to do with a lot of people on campus in a lot of ways. If they have anything to say about those other groups, it's to chastise rather than be sympathetic or friendly. . . . A lot of them are really great people. I just feel like they've closed themselves off to society and the world so much that they can't associate with it. And I just think they don't know how and they don't want to. I personally think that's bad because I don't understand how they're supposed to relate to people who are of the world to try to change them. We aren't supposed to be of the world, but we're supposed to be able to be a witness to those in the world. And if we can't even relate to those in the world, how are we going to be able to talk to them? That's where I think there needs to be a middle ground.

- - Senior, Male

Even though many in the Christian service subgroup do attempt to foster strong relationships with other people, they consider these relationships secondary to their relationship with God. One student offered the reminder that, "it is more important to win the approval of God than the approval of man." With this as their guiding principle, many take their faith response very seriously, and seek to obey all commands and principles set forth in the Bible. They believe that to please God is to obey his commands. It is important for them to be serious about their life choices and to be committed to biblical "standards." As demonstrated by the following respondent, many show genuine concern about how they live their life:

The whole idea of being a world-Christian has been promoted on campus, and it's almost become a cliché. It's an important thing in understanding how people live throughout the world. And I'm really concerned about how people live in the third world - - I really care. People always say, "oh don't try to make me feel guilty about throwing away my food or not finishing what's on my plate because of someone in Ethiopia." And they make a joke of it and they think it's funny because everyone says it. But I really think about these things. I feel like I don't fit in because I'm really concerned about how people live. I think the tension of making decisions about money and the middle class life and how you live is necessary. People need to think about it.

- - Junior, Male

And this concern for living as a Christian goes beyond external actions. Students in this subgroup maintain that the desire for godliness must be "real" - - it must come from within a person. The value of being a genuine person is reflected in this student's comments:

It's like the thing that you are who you are when no one is looking. It's all about character, and I feel like that's something I'm trying to work on. I think that's so important. Like when I'm in my room by myself, do I have

integrity about everything that I do when no one is looking. I feel like some people here don't have that sense of integrity in certain things, even in just little things like manners. When I hear people talk about their quiet times or doing work, it just seems like they try to get by. They try to get all the freebie stuff they can. I don't know if that's just being a student, but I see a lot of people just not caring about having your insides know that you're doing the right thing. It's so easy to look good on the outside, but it's so much harder for what comes out to be reflecting that what's inside is more important.

- - Sophomore, Female

Because these students take their faith commitments and life choices so seriously, they have a hard time understanding others who don't. If God is the final authority for all things, and if indeed a desire for pleasing God is so important (as they think it should be), then disregarding biblical principles seems preposterous to them. One senior male asserted, "I have a high regard for authority and responsibility, and when I see that falling short with some people who think they can dispense with it . . . I have a hard time with that." Character qualities of integrity, honesty, and submission are all very important to this subgroup. One area where this is most often accentuated is the college guidelines specified in the Statement of Responsibilities. Even though all students in this subgroup do not necessarily agree with all that the statement stipulates, they see their obedience to it as a matter of personal integrity. A WCF cabinet member expressed this idea in these terms:

I think in terms of personal convictions regarding the pledge (Statement of Responsibilities), people are going to be more supportive of it because they put their name to it and it becomes an issue of integrity. Integrity is obviously a Christian concept, and WCF is about people who are seeking to do the will of Christ. So if someone is not concerned about integrity, and they call themselves a Christian, then I'm confused. We are concerned about integrity, because integrity is part of the Christian life. . . . Respecting leadership is a Biblical concept, so as much as possible we try to conform ourselves to that. That means if we don't agree with something, I think the majority of us (WCF Cabinet) would say, "we're here for four years, just deal with it." I think as WCF, how can we be anything but respecting authority and standing for integrity. There would be nothing to us. We wouldn't have any substance to our message and would not be ministering because people would say we lack integrity and are wishy-washy in our values. I think it's part of our faith and who we are as persons.

- - Junior, Male

Christian service students also place a value on finding purpose and meaning to life. Many feel it is important to be intentional with life pursuits because Christians have a "higher calling." For this reason, they can often become frustrated or critical of students

who appear complacent about the implications of their faith. As evidenced by the following student's remarks, considering personal motivations is imperative.

I'm not sure the whole of the student body takes college all that seriously and really has a greater purpose to what they're doing. I feel like a lot of people just kind of hang out. I think it comes back to the fact that college is taken for granted. It's just the next step, so people just want to have a good time with it. People are serious with their studies, but when I'm talking about purpose and serious intent, I'm talking about a bigger picture like how does this fit into God's plan for the world. Even though we're here studying, still we don't think about how this really fits into God's plan. Okay, yeah, you study and get good grades, but then you spend your money however you want and go to basketball games and stuff and do whatever. There's no real obligation to anything outside of that.

- - Junior, Female

Students associated with the Christian service subgroup believe that one's faith should affect an individual's perspectives and motivations which, in turn, will impact one's actions. "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:16) is a oft-recited verse that provides both challenge and support to behave in certain ways. Therefore, because of their value commitments, these students often display certain distinguishing behaviors which characterize their cohort group.

Distinctive Behaviors. Jesus's greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-39) was to "love God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself." This biblical imperative is the standard by which many Christian service students orient their life. In terms of "loving God," these students focus on two specific activities that they believe will help foster a better relationship with God - - personal devotions and worship. In terms of "loving their neighbors," these students concentrate considerable energy upon service opportunities and evangelistic outreach.

In order to develop a relationship with God, students feel that they need to spend time with him. This demonstrates their devotion. Spending time with God is labeled in many different ways (e.g. quiet time, time of solitude, devotions), but basically involves some form of self-reflection through study of his word (the Bible) and prayer (talking and listening to him). Although they contend that a relationship with God is based upon grace through faith, and is not of their own works (Ephesians 2:8), closeness to God is often

defined by the amount and quality of time spent in personal devotions. As indicated by one respondent's comments, obedience to God and personal devotions are closely linked:

Quiet time for me is usually half an hour in prayer. I've got a journal where I keep a list of people I'm praying for. Then I spend about a half hour in the Word, just reading. I would like a little more structure to it, but right now I don't have time to go look for a study. But my quiet time is very important to me because I know I need to be obedient and in dialogue with Him. There was a period during my sophomore year when it was a daily thing. I was very close to Him and it was wonderful and I know I've been lacking that since. I don't know exactly why. But I know that out of obedience I need to spend time with Him.

- - Senior, Female

Devotions are a personal habit for a large majority of this student subgroup. Many display a high degree of personal discipline when accommodating extra time into their busy schedules. This student's account is in no way an exaggeration of what some students will do:

I wake up usually around 6:30 in the morning. After a shower, I spend a couple of hours praying and reading. One of the writers who has really influenced me is John Piper, and he talks about finding our fullest satisfaction in God, so that might be what compels us for a hunger and thirst to know God more, that this might be what drives us throughout the day, to be a basis of all our actions and motives. So I find for me to be able to recognize the goodness of God, and to be able to have joy in God, to be seeking him, it takes me a while to wake my heart up. So I'll usually start off the first 20 minutes maybe reading a couple hymns or psalms, or just praising him - - trying to wake myself up. I spend some time praying through different requests - - for things of this campus, for things about myself, for friends, and also for Christian Service Council. Then I'll spend some time trying to do some significant study of Scripture, because I've recognized that if I just read through a chapter, it's worthless. But I try to think through some things, maybe write some notes on it or cross-reference some things. So I try to spend some time studying, then I close in prayer. I usually spend about an hour and a half to two hours, depending on the morning.

- - Senior, Male

Prayer is also a spiritual discipline that receives considerable attention in this group. Because they believe God to be all-powerful and ever-present in this world, their first recourse in times of difficulty is to "turn to God in prayer." Though prayer is used for times of praise and thanksgiving to God, it is more often used as a means of offering petitions to God. They don't assume their prayers will necessarily control the will of God. However, they do pray in earnest believing they can influence God's will with their

intercession. As expressed by one student, many feel the need to schedule time for prayer that moves beyond the spontaneous.

I never saw prayer as a ministry in and of itself. I've always seen it as a secondary objective for preparing for some other ministry. I've been learning to just spend time in prayer as my ministry. God calls for us to pray to him, and somehow we are allowed to move the mind of God. So I've been trying to dedicate much more time to prayer in my life this year.

- - Junior, Male

Personal times of devotion to God are also complemented by communal times of devotion. Students in this subgroup place a premium upon times for designated worship. In addition to regular church attendance, chapel and WCF, these students relish opportunities to gather with other Christians to sing, pray, teach, and share life experiences. Opportunities for collective worship at Wheaton College are numerous. Many students include "worship times" into meetings designated for other purposes (e.g. with various clubs and organizations). Residence halls also sponsor times for floor or hall worship. And all-school communion services designated for special occasions (e.g. returning to school, Day of Fasting and Praying) draw a large crowd of Wheaton students. One senior female even acknowledged that, "I enjoy worshiping so much that we'll even do it some times with the people just in my house - - we'll pull out our hymnals and just sing and pray."

For students who are so zealous in their religious pursuits, times of personal devotions and worship offer important reminders of and directives for their faith commitments. However, the tendency to treat these special times as the culmination of their faith experience cause many to view these occasions as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. In other words, some Christian service students gain a sense of spiritual accomplishment from devotional times or worship, but neglect to consider what implications these disciplines carry for the rest of their daily existence. A dichotomy between a spiritual life (devotions and worship) and a secular life is created. Some students concentrate upon "devotions" for God rather than devotion to God. Instead of seeing all of life as opportunity to worship the Creator, some tend to restrict worship times to a particular time and place.

The fervor that Christian service students place upon specific times of personal

devotion or worship leads other students to question what motivation drives their involvement in religious practices. Is it only to fulfill some type of hidden psychological need? Are Christian service students motivated more by an emotional experience than by anything else? One student offered this caustic remark:

They really like the occasional pep talk or worship - - pep worship. It seems that people like to live from epiphany to epiphany there. This group likes to go from a good worship service to a great sermon tape to a good chapel. "The Lord really used him to speak to me," especially the challenging speakers that are asking you to go and preach. This gets people going, and I think these students seek that out many times. I've heard Dr. Litfin called a great president because his chapel messages really "touch me." What does that say about the administration position. I think a president is good if he interacts with the faculty well, if good faculty are staying here and other good ones are being hired, if the school's reputation is improving, things like that - - not if students are getting warm fuzzies in chapel.

- - Senior, Male

Another student summarized some of these same concerns by saying:

My hesitation about that group (Christian service) is that I think their mind-set can often be more emotional and more emotionally driven than perhaps intellectually driven. I'd like to walk the middle line as much as possible between those two things. On the one hand, I think some can err on not being emotional and being afraid of emotions. But this group (Christian service) tends to have the focus solely upon emotions and an emotional experience. I think they can neglect to see how God is more than just an emotional experience.

- - Junior, Female

That said, a major behavioral characteristic of the Christian service subgroup that helps to temper these criticisms is that these students are very involved in ministry opportunities. Since many plan to pursue a religious vocation of some kind after college, they often welcome any practical preparation in ministry. This is why for many, what happens outside of the classroom is more important than what takes place inside the classroom. Many feel that Christian service activities are among their most important aspects of their college experience. The following student exemplified this connection between vocational desires for ministry and participation with Christian service activities while in college when he remarked:

I came to Wheaton and have been studying Christian Education with an intercultural emphasis. I'm taking a lot of Latin American studies, because I'd like to go to Latin America. I want to serve in the ministry, either in the

U.S. or Latin America. If I'm in the U.S., I'd like to mobilize the church for missions. If I'm overseas, I'd either like to mobilize their churches or take the gospel to people who have never heard the name of Christ. That's where my heart is. And that's why I get involved in ministries here. With WCF cabinet, we have the same vision and passion for the most part. I think God has put this passion in me for mobilizing the church and for world evangelism. To put in all the time for WCF, that has to be at least a little of your passion.

- - Junior, Female

Beyond vocational preparation, many Christian service students get involved in ministries just because they feel that their faith demands it. To be serious about one's religious commitments implies that something will be shown for it. One student asserted, "I feel like I want to put my faith on the line and say this is what I believe and this is what I'm doing about it." Yet another respondent observed that many of these students become engaged to the point of over-commitment:

There's a group of students who are really proactive with their Christian life. They're always involved in ministries and always involved in stuff going on and excited about someone they've been talking to. They value doing work for the kingdom right now. They just value their faith. They show a lot of concern for other people, and can even get over-committed with what ministries they get involved with. But I feel that they do a really good thing. Even if just institutionally, I think it's important for our school to be making an impact in it's community.

- - Senior, Male

Many Christian service students reason that if what really matters in life is one's relationship to God and service for him, then why not focus on ministry opportunities now? In this regard, many of these students perceive their formal education in only perfunctory terms. What is important for them is pragmatic, "hands-on" results, not esoteric, abstract theorizing. One student argues that, "you could spend all of your time studying and not getting in and doing your work for the Kingdom. You're not going to answer all of the questions of life in books." As full time students, many wrestle with this dilemma. A contrasting point of view from one student acknowledged this tension, but offered an alternative perspective for the student's calling:

There's a tension between academics and service - - service narrowly conceived as doing a ministry in the Office of Christian Outreach or at your church. Most people find it important to feel like they are serving in some sense or ministering in some sense. The appeals in chapel for ministry opportunities reinforce the general need to feel that there's a "hands-on"

service going on in various forms. So it's hard to convince people that training your mind or the student's calling is a service and is for Christ and His Kingdom as well.

- - Senior, Male

In that many Christian service students are passionate about immediate service for God's kingdom, they typically attempt to spread their enthusiasm for ministry to other students. Unfortunately, some make assumptions about what is appropriate for ministry, and when their enthusiastic advances are disregarded by others, the tendency to be judgmental is not far away. Many respondents acknowledged a feeling of pressure from this group to fulfill ministry obligations as if it were some kind of "spiritual duty."

I get it in all the chapel addresses, World Christian Fellowship, letters to the editor, etc., that if you're not involved in these organizations or if you don't speak in certain ways or do certain types of ministry then you're not as spiritual as these people. I don't think they think that in all honesty, but it tends to come across that way.

- - Junior, Female

The pressure to get involved in ministry is pervasive on Wheaton's campus and within the student culture. Consequently, some may get involved for the wrong reasons - - as if to prove something or live up to an image. Another student assessed this tendency in herself as well as other Wheaton students:

One thing that's important to some students is a desire for immediate service. With myself, I needed it as proof to God and proof to everyone else that I'm serving. Instead of waiting it out and seeing how my studies will leave me, there's an immediate emphasis to jump in right now and prove that I'm doing it. In chapel on Wednesday, somebody in a ministry talked about how they were serving in a way that they could never serve through classes. I also think there's a lot of pressure to do something with Christian Service Council, especially your freshmen year. Students feel that, "I need to prove to everybody that I am a good person and that I'm doing what God wants me to do so that nobody can say that I'm not." I think that perspective is fairly prevalent among students. I think that may lie behind Wheaton students over-committing all the time - - just to prove something and look for approval.

- - Junior, Female

It is generally accepted that Wheaton students are performance oriented high achievers. For this reason, many Christian service students constantly struggle with their motivations for ministry. While not characteristic of the whole group, there are some who are attracted to ministry for appearance sake, and their service behaviors end up being

artificial. It isn't difficult for some "outsiders" to offer their criticisms of this perceived hypocrisy.

I think there is the subculture of Christian Education types who are interested more in the appearance of super-spirituality and the formula for super-spirituality - - like putting your time in your devotions every morning, and put in your time at church on Sundays and Wednesdays, and then do a Christian service on Fridays. As long as you plug in, then that's what is important.

- - Senior, Male

My perception of them (Christian service subgroup) is that they value the label of servant and not servanthood. I guess I've had too many positive examples of servants even before Wheaton who I didn't realize were serving me. So I see the high-profile image as a real shortcoming for some of the service oriented people here. And I think they value busyness and constant activity at the expense or cost of processing things contemplatively - - contemplating the mission of their mission or the drive behind their mission and just movement for the sake of movement.

- - Junior, Male

The Christian service type of students is the group that is most passionate and expressive about their faith. They are not afraid to hide their commitment to God nor their behavioral acts of Christian devotion. They actively and enthusiastically participate in many institutional or student sponsored "spiritual" activities (e.g. worship services, Bible studies, prayer times). Yet underlying all their passion and zeal is really an overriding feeling of dissatisfaction. Many of their decisions and choices are motivated by a sense of unease - - a feeling that the world and society is progressively deteriorating and drastic measures are needed to escape its death-hold. For one set of students in this group, this sense of unease is generated from personal experience. The family backgrounds for some of these students are very troubling and disturbing. Their plea for God is one of desperation. They experienced the dark side of humanity and have found many "answers" in this world to be lacking. A second set of students may be just as fervent in their pursuit of God, but are motivated more by a sense of obligation than desperation. They were enculturated to believe about the importance of Christian faith in addressing all the maladies of society. They learned about the "evils of the world," but didn't experience them.

Regardless of the source of their dissatisfaction, students in this group often respond in the same way - - they strive for God. In their minds, a sense of God's presence is the only solution to the bondage of the world's presence. This is the group that is the most dissatisfied with American culture. They also express the most disdain for anything "worldly" or carnal. They strive to identify with anything considered Christian or helpful to their Christian walk. For this reason, they typically give serious consideration to full-time Christian ministry or at least serious involvement with a church. In this way, they maintain and reinforce their focus on "eternity."

Not surprisingly, their activities on campus are a reflection of church and parachurch operations. Christian service students get involved in preaching and teaching opportunities, evangelism, leading worship services, visiting hospitals, jails, and nursing homes, tutoring younger students, and several other service-related responsibilities. Through their endeavors they try to emulate their own versions of what they feel churches and parachurch organizations should be doing. Their efforts are experiments in adulthood. Christian service students try to be very serious and responsible with their life pursuits. They want to be doing what is "really going to count for eternity." As a result, many consider their commitments outside the classroom and even outside the campus to be their top priority. Their sense of urgency causes many to dismiss the importance of their college education.

This rejection of many cultural and societal pursuits is not unlike many extensions of the Evangelical church. There is a perception among some Evangelical circles (although not all) that intellectual pursuits and earthly possessions are distractions to the more important affairs of the "heavenly realm." These tendencies can be a form of escape for some, but they also reflect a genuine interest in knowing God. Christian service students are no different, and this generation even takes their passion one step further. They not only want to know God, they want to "feel" and experience him as well. By most standards, these Christian service students would be considered very unique. Compared to most other college students in America, Christian service students would be classified as counter-culture. However, at Wheaton, they fit comfortably into the mainstream student culture. They appear to most fervently reflect the Evangelical Christian commitments of the

“official culture.” They are probably also the largest subgroup at Wheaton. For these reasons, they also tend to be the basis of comparison for all other subgroups. Other types of students, in clarifying their identity, must provide some sort of resolution as to why they are different from Christian service students. It is a comparison that is probably unfair, but pervasive nonetheless.

The College Life Student Type at Wheaton College

The Football Team: A College Life Subculture

For most students at Wheaton College, late afternoons are a quiet time in their daily schedules. Students return from classes to their living quarters, fling their book bag on their desk, and collapse onto their bed or couch with a sigh of exhaustion. Chances are high that some students will stay in that position for an afternoon nap. Others will get up to do homework, socialize with friends, or perhaps venture outdoors to toss a frisbee or take a walk. For the most part, Wheaton’s campus on a weekday afternoon is a fairly relaxed place. However, there are a few spaces on Wheaton’s campus where this relaxed, casual atmosphere takes on a different look.

One such place is the campus weight-room. Located in the lower level of the college’s old gymnasium building, the weight-room facility - - by outward appearance - - is anything but inspiring. Step inside its door on a weekday afternoon, however, and something quite different appears. Amid bright lights, loud music blaring from overhead speakers, and the thick, odorous air of moist heat and sweat, one observes a bustling of activity and people. If not straining beneath the weight of a barbell, spotting for a friend in that position, or adjusting the weight designation on a fitness machine, students in the weight room walk around to stretch, rest, or offer occasional glances toward the wall mirror to inspect their progress. Although jovial laughter or playful activity are not uncommon in this setting, most students remain fairly somber as if encountering a formidable task. Admittedly few would consider weight-lifting a fun activity, but the somber looks are more easily attributable to a sense of dedication than any feeling of

displeasure. These students are here to conduct serious business, exerting hard work and energy in the process. Some even carry a check-list with them to ensure adherence to a prescribed exercise regiment.

While all Wheaton College students are welcome to use the weight-room facility during afternoon hours, the conspicuous majority there represent one student subgroup - - the football team. Football players and weight-lifting go hand-in-hand, so the number of student athletes using the weight room on a weekday afternoon is anything but extraordinary. Slightly more amazing, however, is the fact that this display of masculinity is most prevalent during the winter months, well after the football season is over. For football players, the football season begins in January, not August. One player insisted, "if you want to play next year, you have to sign a commitment sheet early and start the first of January. Anyone who tries to join late in the year just won't make it." One senior co-captain stated:

I think all of us who join have a certain drive in our heart to be competitive and win something. Guys in the past have tried to join to be a part of the social group, and that's fine, but they don't realize what the work ethic is and what we really try to do. If people join and are willing to work hard, we'll adopt them into our group real quick. If anybody doesn't put forth effort, we'll kind of exclude them, and they'll just drop out. We'll let them know if they're not doing it right, and if they don't want to change, then we don't want them as part of our team.

A commitment to physical exercise in the late afternoon on a cold day in January demonstrates the level of dedication football players give to their cause. The effort put forth is by personal volition. "Work-outs" are not mandatory. Football coaches do not require practices in the off-season. The football players simply devote themselves to the established instrument of their development - - the weight-room.

The attraction to the weight-room is fairly obvious for football players. Weight-lifting and exercise increases one's physical strength which improves performance on the playing field. This is their goal. One player stated, "we want to win a championship and be the best team that we can be, so we know that we must be in excellent physical shape." However, on a deeper level, there are also a number of less obvious reasons why so many football players find themselves straining muscles and sweating profusely on any given

afternoon. In addition to physical development, football players value the “weight-room experience” for learning “lessons” about life, for building a masculine identity, and for gaining a sense of belonging from a team. These additional motivations, often only tacitly understood, contribute to the cultural landscape of the football program and provide definition for what it means to be a part of the Wheaton football subculture.

In reality, most football players agree that participation in their subculture is about more than just the game of football. It’s about the “game” of life - - learning lessons from strenuous work-outs and a disciplined lifestyle that relate to other life experiences. The following two players summed up this perspective well by saying:

Football is not necessarily all about winning. It’s great to win a national championship or the conference championship, but it’s who you become in the process that’s important. And through doing those things, you become someone different and more of who you want to be. Through the process, you will not be a loser. . . . I’ve probably learned more in athletics than what I did with doing school work - - not in terms of cognitive material, but in terms of discipline, perseverance, teamwork, group dynamics, time management, all that stuff.

- - Senior, Male

Athletics can teach you so much about life. I would desire for everyone to learn that in one way or another. A lot of the analogies get old and get used too many times in athletics and life, but there really is a really strong parallel between the two. Things don’t always go your way, and things fall apart sometimes. But just the ability to go out and work, no matter what, is important. You’re going to have good days, and you’re going to have bad days. But you just don’t quit. You give it your all, and you give it, and give it, and give it until you can’t give anymore. I just think that’s a lesson that I’ll always take with me from football. You have to play hurt in football, and you have to play hurt in life. You’re going to have days of being sick, but you go to class or work anyway. You do the things that you need to do for your family. You find that time to spend with your wife. You get your priorities straight. And I think a lot of that ties into my search to become a man. It’s being consistent in your actions and doing what you need to do for no other reason than because you said you’d do it.

- - Senior, Male

Most of the players attribute these “lessons of life” to the influence of their coaching staff. Many shared a high regard for their coaches’ examples, and often recited favorite phrases or statements heard in practice, on the playing field, or around campus. One player went so far as to say, “the biggest thing of importance to me about the football team is the example of the coaches. Issues like dedication, humility, integrity - - these are beat into

you by the coaches. That is the whole work of the football team.” Players pick up on their examples, and attempt to emulate them through their own peer mentoring. This is clearly personified by the senior leadership of the team:

Seniors are especially called upon each year to be leaders of the team. We meet a lot - - like every Tuesday and Thursday - - and we’ll have a devotional, we’ll talk about the problems of the team and where we want the team to go, and then we’ll go out and say, “hey, we’ve got to get this guy and make sure he’s on the right track and help him out by keeping him accountable.” The coaches encourage it and the seniors just do it because that’s just the way it’s been throughout. That’s one of the real neat things about Wheaton football that I noticed when I came as a freshman to visit is that the upperclassmen take you under their wings. They want to make sure you’re doing okay and doing what you should be doing. And they want to help you out.

- - Senior, Male

Whether from peers or coaches, Wheaton football players hear about important lessons of life. On the team, attention is devoted as much to character development as to game strategies or athletic skills. From these lessons, student athletes feel that they gain practical, “down-to-earth” guidance that is perhaps even more valuable than anything learned in the classroom. Consider, for example, the following comments made by players regarding discipline, integrity, and a strong work-ethic:

From football I get discipline. Coach often says, “people want to have demands placed on them. As much as you say you don’t, you do.” Inside every good man, there’s a part of him that wants to be disciplined and wants to have things asked of him and demanded of him. He also says you feel so much better about yourself after you go through an off-season workout at 5:30 in the morning for an hour and a half, and you work as hard as you could and didn’t hold anything back, then if you had just kind of gotten by and not put your all into it. You feel so much better about yourself when you get done. He’s right, and I think this has carried over into many other areas of my life. Sometimes I don’t want to go into the weight room and lift for an hour. It’s not fun and I don’t want to. But I go and do it, and when I’m done, I feel good that I’ve been taught a lesson.

- - Senior, Male

I think we have a big emphasis on integrity, because a lot of our work-outs are on our own honor, and if we wanted to, we could not do them at all and just check off on the list that we did them when we really didn’t. But I think we all share the same honesty in working toward a common goal which is basically to win a championship or to provide unity as a team. And integrity is involved with a lot of that.

- - Senior, Male

I think we value a strong work-ethic, because it takes a lot of work and

dedication to go through all the work-outs and practices that are required to be a football player. We learn what it means to be committed to something and to follow through with that commitment, even when the going gets tough.

- - Junior, Male

Perhaps another important “lesson” obtained from the football experience is the emphasis placed on one’s Christian life. Not to be outdone by their “Christian service” peers, players frequently enumerated the ways that football applied to their Christian development. However, their application corresponded with their perception of what Christianity should look like. For them, the spiritual life of Christianity was about taking strong stands and working hard to maintain stability and perseverance. One player shared his insight about the spiritual lessons of football in this way:

It goes for the spiritual life as well. The disciplines of being a Christian are not easy either. The temptations come in many different areas and many different times and forms, and you need to do what is right because it’s right. When it comes to football, you do the drill the right way because it’s the right way to do it. In a relationship, you do things the right way and you’re faithful to her because that’s the right thing to do. Coach’s saying to us before we go home for Spring Break or whenever there’s a time where we’re on the pledge or things are asked of us, he says, “you know the difference between wrong and right . . . do right.” Things are very black and white for the football coaches at this school. There’s wrong, and there’s right, and you do right. And you shut up and don’t make excuses, and you don’t complain, you just do it. And I think that’s a lesson that a lot of people need to learn in life.

- - Senior, Male

With this emphasis, many football players tend to view any emotional component of Christianity as suspect. One player accentuated this sentiment when he said:

One of the professors summed up what I think applies to the football team by saying, “if Christianity is simply based on emotion, when your emotion is gone, then where is your Christianity?” A lot of us think that way. I don’t know if we’re more conservative or what, but I just think the whole program is like that. The coaches emphasize being steady and stable. And that goes along with the way the coaches run the football program because they talk about discipline and doing the things you have to do to be committed, even when you don’t feel like doing them. It’s the same way in your spiritual walk. Even if you don’t have some of those feelings, you still have to get in the word and all that stuff.

- - Senior, Male

Self-conscious of the poor image that football players possess in this country and even on Wheaton’s campus, many players reacted defensively when asked about their

Christianity. While cherishing the Christian commitment of the institution, many players criticized other groups on campus as too emotional and overly focused upon an external presentation.

I think that a living example is the big key. For me when I came to visit, the football team was more normal to me than the rest of campus, which was just very charismatic spiritually. And that was a real shock back then, whereas the football team just does things right and lives right. Coach has a big saying that, "there's a difference between right and wrong - - do right." That just kind of exemplifies the difference as opposed to the more showy spiritual activities. You live it, you don't just get all outspoken and emotional about it. I don't think the football team is filled with a bunch of evangelists who are very charismatic, emotional Bible thumpers. We believe in Jesus and we live that way, but we're not going to go out and try to preach to everyone.

- - Junior, Male

Of course, other students on campus counter with their own criticisms of the "football player" mentality. One student commented, "Football players have a rather impersonal, non-emotive, non-revealing sort of relationship - - the purely traditional masculine identity - - kind of isolated individual within a group of other isolated individuals that talk about external situations, like 'the game' or whatever." This student's assessment offers an insightful glimpse into a second major benefit of the "weight-room" experience for football players - - the development of one's masculine identity. Football players appreciate a "tough guy" image. Outside of the weight-room is a phrase written on the wall that serves as an inspiration to many players: "Don't die wondering." This phrase, many football players emphasized, led many to work hard and strive to reach their aspirations. As one senior male said:

This [phrase] means you've got to risk it all. You've got to put so much into what you're striving for. You can't pull back and say, "oh, I'll never be that good." You've got to go get it - - you've got to do it, and not just wonder what might have happened or how good you could have been had you tried. You can't worry about the risk and what could happen.

As a result of their quest to accentuate their masculine identity, many Wheaton students perceive football players as only trying to "push their weight around." One student even proposed that power was the real motivation behind the actions of many football players:

All those things define their masculinity. They reinforce it to their friends.

Getting stronger and always talking about weight rooms is an issue of power. And football is the thing that draws them together, and that's the way they see their male bonding take shape. They do a lot together. And I think that most guys struggle with power, but with the football guys, that's more obvious than with other groups on campus because that's all they talk about. That's why the "bench" is such a big deal to them because it's a power struggle. Of the people that get involved in the "bench brawls," I would say that about 90% of them are football players. They get to turn against each other finally and act out all the things they've been saying about who's the strongest or fastest. Power is related to a physical attribute, at least in the football setting.

- - Senior, Male

Interestingly, many female students also recognize the emphasis on perceived masculinity among football players. One female student observed that:

When I'm around my guy friends, I'm not aware of the fact that I'm a girl or I don't think about it because I'm very comfortable around them. There are certain guys, however, that when I'm around them (especially guys that play football), I'm just very aware of the fact that I'm a girl because they're very aware of the fact that they're a man and are more masculine. So I'd say they value masculinity a lot and the separation from anything feminine.

- - Senior, Female

Despite criticisms from their peers, Wheaton football players often remain loyal to their weight-room training for a third major reason - - in order to identify with and belong to a team. Being a part of a group, sharing common experiences with friends, and building memories are all important to Wheaton football players. Because of the time spent together in football training, practice, or games, these players often develop very close relationships with each other - - many times to the exclusion of outsiders. Many respondents commented about the prominent presence of football players eating together in the dining commons. One female student even criticized their lack of consideration, but recognized their strong sense of community:

I tend to have a bad attitude toward football players because I think they're rude. They cut in line in the dining commons and try to get the bench and hurt people in the process. It seems juvenile to me. It's a strong sense of belonging. If they are rude or mean in the process, it doesn't matter because they belong.

- - Senior, Female

One word frequently mentioned among football players was the term "program." The players' strong dedication to football seemed to be about more than just the game. It involved dedication to a whole package - - to a specific outlook about the Wheaton college

experience. In learning practical lessons on life and developing one's masculine identity, Wheaton football players became consumed by an emphasis on one thing - - the football team. Life for a football player revolves around the football team. While involved in academics and other activities on campus, these football players chose to spend most of their time and energy dedicated to one particular extra-curricular activity at Wheaton. In this way, Wheaton football players emulate the characteristics of the second primary student subgroup - - the college life typology.

Characteristics of the College Life Student Type

In her classic historical analysis, Horowitz (1987) described a dominant student subgroup that arose on most American college campuses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Labeled as "college life," this subgroup initially consisted of only males who concentrated upon fraternity life and extracurricular activities like athletics, the student newspaper, and student government. In time, women were also incorporated into the subgroup, but the group's focus on hedonism, social exclusivity, and the rejection of serious academic work did not diminish. A version of the college life subgroup also developed among Wheaton students early in its history, yet, given the institution's historic commitments against secret societies and fraternities (Bechtel, 1984) and its moral and behavioral prohibitions, this subgroup paled in comparison to the hedonism, cheating, and alcohol consumption characteristic of college life groups on other campuses (Horowitz, 1989). Nevertheless, through the years, Wheaton students have established a number of groups centered around extracurricular activities found on most college campuses (Hamilton, 1995).

Today, Wheaton students get heavily involved in a wide variety of similar activities including athletics (20 sponsored intercollegiate sports teams), various clubs and organizations (over 50), student publications (the Record, the student newspaper; Tower, the yearbook; or Kodon, a student literary journal), various musical groups (9 college-sponsored groups), theater productions, the campus radio station, student government, and several other student organizations. Many students participate in these extracurricular activities with only marginal commitments. But for some students, an extracurricular

activity becomes the predominant priority in their college experience, even above and beyond their academic pursuits. Similar to the football team previously described, these college life students share many distinguishing values and behaviors that characterize them as a particular typology of students. Regarding values, the “college life” student values an identification with an established group, a sense of personal accomplishment, and the personal enjoyment that accompanies social interaction with peer group friendships. Concerning behaviors, most get overly involved in their particular extracurricular focus, and tend to concentrate heavily upon the social dynamics of college life.

Distinctive Values. Participation in an extracurricular activity implies identification with an established group. One reason students select to be involved in an activity is to secure the emotional and relational support that comes from good friendships. To be a part of a group provides a sense of belonging - - a sense of personal identity. It provides a place of safety where one can feel acceptance and worth from others. In describing the experience of athletes, one student summarized the camaraderie he feels with his teammates:

To be in a sport is about camaraderie. They go through tough stuff together, so they feel this extra bond that separates them from everyone else. Camaraderie is important for significance. They've got a gift in one area, and it becomes intensified when together with the team. You're only as good as the weakest player, which causes a team mentality which breeds a lot of dependency and friendships and intimacy. There's respect shown to one another. So I think that the camaraderie of being a team and knowing that they are needed and knowing that they need each other is just a really important thing for them.

- - Senior, Male

The value of group identification is further exemplified by the diligent efforts of group members in maintaining and protecting that identity. Because students take ownership for their extracurricular commitments, they strive for their group or activity to be considered a success. If students perceive their involvement as important and group achievements as significant, students can often become possessive of this group identity. Attacks against the group are viewed personally. And group membership is restricted to only deserving members. Often the result is that some groups are considered by outsiders

as exclusive or elitist. But notice how one football team member reacts to this accusation against his team. Based on his presumptive statements about other students, his own assumptions about the value of group identification become obvious.

What it really comes down to - - and this is not an egotistical statement, this is just how I honestly feel and I've heard it expressed by a lot of people outside of football - - but a lot of people are jealous of the fact that the football team is so tight and so close, that there are tables of football players that eat together. And there's a lot of students at this campus that have a desire to belong, and they really desire to be a part of something like what we have. There are a lot of other groups that wish it was that way for them.

- - Senior, Male

Participation in college life is about more than just group identification, however. Students also get involved with extracurricular activities to demonstrate and pursue some of their own individual abilities. Students want to accomplish something of personal worth, and many use an identification with a group to advance and enhance their individual goals. To be considered a success in college, students feel that they must accomplish something distinctive. Thus many turn to college life activities as a means and avenue for achievement. As one student emphasized, good performance in extracurricular activities brings status and high acclaim from others:

Performance is something that is respected and hailed, so many students are in the business of performing. For people who perform well, it doesn't seem like there's any reason why they should be as popular as they are. But some perform really well, so that gives them status. They're considered as a level up. So students place a value on winning and looking strong for personal achievement - - and also team achievement. People want to succeed.

- - Senior, Male

Such "success" seldom happens at the expense of personal enjoyment. Students in the college life subgroup view extracurricular activities as a leisurely escape from the grind of academic work. They often refer to classes and books as the "price" one pays for enjoying college life (Horowitz, 1989). Their focus is on having a good time, and for many, extracurricular involvement is a primary source of pleasure. Even times of difficulty and strain are tolerated because of what is gained in overall enjoyment and personal fulfillment. A student writer for a campus publication said, "it demands a lot of work and hassle, but I wouldn't trade the experience for the world because it's what I love doing."

And when and if college life students do get involved in academic efforts, it's usually with ulterior motives in mind. They strive to get a good grade, but only because of what a good grade will bring them in the future - - more enjoyment from possessions or status. Thus, just getting by supplants the goals of learning in the classroom. One student's candid, though cynical, summation of this group is quite revealing.

There are students who are really into social interaction and just doing a lot of stuff, like dating more on weekends. These people are at Wheaton to get a degree, but are just kind of going along - - going through the routine of an education. Usually the education doesn't mean a whole lot. They study to get good grades. So they're not so consumed with ministry, or even academic pursuits. Their whole value structure would be suburbia - - have a big house, three kids, drive a Mercedes, and have a country-club membership, and maybe make some donations to the church.

- - Senior, Male

In the end, what a majority of college life students value most about college is "having a great time." One student's comments aptly summarized the view many of his "college life" friends shared of their collegiate experience when he said:

When you think of college, you think of having a good time in many ways, at least that's my mentality. Yeah you're learning a lot, and God's probably the main focus, but everybody always talks about their college years as the parties and having a great time. . . . I think a lot of people come in wanting to stick with being a "right-winger" and being a straight arrow and not straying - - academics and that's it. I came in with kind of that attitude because I wanted to succeed. But I also learned to be able to relax and to have a good time. That's kind of been my philosophy probably more and more, which is not necessarily a good thing. But to just have a good time and to have a lot of memories, that's important. It's a time when you enjoy your youth while you still have it.

- - Senior, Male

Distinctive Behaviors. The most obvious distinguishing behavior for this group is the amount of time and mental energy they devote to their specified activity. College life students spend as much or more time with their extracurricular commitments as they do with their class attendance and homework. One sophomore female commented that, "There's a lot of extra-curricular things to do that pull you away from academics. It's hard not to get caught up in that. The people I hang out with don't study very much but we have a lot of fun." Perhaps this is why one student, when critiquing athletes on campus, offered this assessment:

The sport groups stick by themselves. The stereotype is that they don't spend the same time thinking about reading and writing as much. I don't think of a lot of literature majors as people on sports teams. They don't seem as cerebral. They're more into sports. When I lived with some athletes, they didn't seem to think about things that much. They tended to be more concentrated in the science majors, but they didn't tend to think about things as analytically as my friends do about Wheaton or about the Evangelical world or about themselves.

- - Junior, Female

Students who spend considerable time in extracurricular activities also spend considerable amounts of time with people. For this reason, college life students tend to be socially active. Many have extroverted personalities that contribute to their extracurricular ambitions. Thus, while they strive to accomplish personal goals, they also strive for relationships. They aspire for what one student referred to as, "the nebulous, ever-elusive cool thing to do." They are the ones most likely to be involved with many of the college's social programs (like college union activities, concerts, banquets, or athletic events). And many afford special time in their schedule to just "hanging out" with other students and friends (going to a restaurant, renting a video, or simply socializing in a residence hall or apartment). Overall, this group enjoys participation in the "life" of the campus. One student appropriately labeled this group as the "social crowd."

There's a group of students that are kind of the social crowd - - those brought here to make Wheaton well rounded. They value the social aspect of life. They are the ones who do most of the dating and who do most of the wacky things. They're laid back. They usually come from secular schools. Usually they're pretty trendy in keeping up with the kinds of dress, and they listen to all the trendy music. They're very conscious of dating and going out and feel that classes get in the way, which goes contrary to what a lot of people think Wheaton is. They're also the ones throwing the parties.

- - Junior, Female

Having a good time socially is defined by students in a number of ways. However, many respondents acknowledged that some students turn to different forms of substance abuse as a means of experiencing fun. One student offered an honest appraisal for some of his friends:

I think they look at this as more of the college years, when you're going to have a good time and "I'll do what I want to do." I've struggled with this a lot - - just kind of understanding what that means. Like are they just putting Christianity on hold, because they want to have their glory days. They put

their fun before everything else - - it comes before grades, it comes before Christianity, etc. They'll say, "if Christianity is going to get in my way, then Christianity doesn't fit for me right now, even though I know it's very important." . . . They're young and getting the bugs out of them, so some people want to just get out and have a good time. So they hang out. Every clique kind of goes off on their own. If anybody sees them doing these things, then they'll get in big trouble. So a lot of them go off campus and out of Wheaton itself - - downtown Chicago, at clubs, bars, etc. If they want to go out studying and sit and smoke, they'll go to Denny's in Lisle or in some little hole-in-the-wall joint, because a lot of these people aren't 21, so they can't get into a lot of places. I would say that for them, right here and right now is what's important. To them, their time at Wheaton is considered college time and having good times, and if drinking is part of it, then hey, drinking's part of it.

- - Senior, Male

College life students are eclectic in approach. They like to consider themselves as masters of many domains. They strive to be the epitome of a well-rounded college student. They value their classroom endeavors and realize the importance of learning in this setting. However, they also choose to supplement their classroom learning with out-of-classroom learning. For them, the curriculum is on equal terms with the extra-curriculum (actually, many prefer the term co-curriculum). For many, the "lessons of life" from college activities are just as important as any lessons in the classroom. Thus, college life students get heavily involved in campus life. They want to "soak up" everything available to them at the college. Beyond academic commitments, they often get involved in various "spiritual" activities, social activities, and typically one activity of special concentration (demonstrating their particular talents).

But their endorsement of college life is really about personal achievement and personal identity. They feel that in order to have a successful college experience, they must accomplish something distinctive. They typically have high ambitions for involvement, and learn many significant lessons about discipline and time-management along the way. But most lessons come on their own terms. They determine the breadth and depth of their learning by the choices of their involvements. In actuality, they typically surround themselves with a supportive social group, often using this group identification to enhance

their own personal goals. And for the most part, involvement in a specific college activity is essentially an avenue or means for building their own self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. In the end, while espousing the ideals of a well-rounded education, college life students often find their collegian pursuits to be quite limited in scope. The attention given to one specific college life activity often helps them develop many important personal and interpersonal skills, but it also keeps them restrained within the boundaries of their particular college life subculture.

The Counterculture Student Type at Wheaton College

The "Death Holes" Band: A Counterculture Subculture

The room is dark, the audience is quiet, and the anticipation is mounting. A door from a side entrance opens, and a person dressed in full costume emerges. Gradually making his way to the center stage, he picks up an electric guitar and begins strumming the first chords of an eerie, pulsating, instrumental medley. Resembling the look of a nuclear waste investigator, his full-body, white radiation suit with hood and bootlegs glimmers in the beam of the overhead stage lights. The audience, fascinated by the originality of this unusual spectacle, is even more startled by his pale face painted white with black around his eyes. The atmosphere is gloomy, and the dissonant, atonal sounds from his guitar only add to the mystery. Many in the audience are so entranced by the moment as to miss the entrance of the remaining band members. Each band member, in corresponding costume, arrives one at a time and takes their place behind a designated instrument. Next to come is the second electric guitar player, followed by the bass guitar player, and then the drummer. As each joins in with the medley, the music increases in allegro and forte, culminating in a crescendo of intensity. At the peak of excitement, with the audience gyrating and bouncing with exhilaration, the final member - - and designated group mascot - - saunters onto the stage and screams the first words of the song into the microphone. The "Death Holes" have appeared.

Student bands have become a fixture on many American college campuses, and

Wheaton College is no exception. With a conservatory of music and many musically inclined students, Wheaton becomes host to a number of different student-generated musical groups and bands. The College Union even sponsors a number of "Coffee Houses" during the school year for the purpose of show-casing the musical talents of students. And Kodon, a student literary journal, coordinates a biannual production of a compact disc that features most campus bands. Some bands or individuals become so popular and successful as to continue after their collegiate years, producing their own albums and performance venues.

However, performances by campus bands are usually about more than just playing music. Students want to put on a show. They consider their efforts to be performance art - - focused as much on the theatrical atmosphere as on the musical quality of their presentation. They want their audience to experience something. They use their music as a medium for conveying a message - - a message that appeals to a certain type of student on Wheaton's campus. For the most part, campus bands at Wheaton have become an outlet of expression for a "counterculture" perspective. Students who struggle with Wheaton's religious insularity and moralistic prohibitions use a campus concert as a cathartic experience. One member of a band contrasts artistic expression with the experience of chapel:

I would say that most of the counterculture group are tied to the arts. You go into chapel expecting a sermon to not be challenging at all - - to just be rehash of old material. I go in expecting to hear everything I've heard before. That's not to say I have it all mastered, it's just that chapel seems to capitalize on the same things over and over again. But I think the arts and the artistic community provide students with fresh insights - - a fresh way to "preach a sermon." It's not some guy that's on some lofty spiritual height looking down at you. These are just people you know - - your friends. They're sharing parts of themselves with you through the arts. It's not a pansy, "touchy-feely" thing at all. It's providing an atmosphere where everyone can come together. It's a social time when everyone can hang out and just have fun and be together. But at the same time, there's this element that people come together because they want to be challenged. They want to listen to what their friends are thinking and appreciate the good musicians on this campus.

- - Senior, Male

And so it is with the "Death Holes." Their desire is to provide an experience - - and one that will be remembered. For this reason, they are not afraid to push the boundaries of

artistic expression. In addition to their unusual costumes, the band projects onto an overhead screen the images of discombobulated shapes taken from a computer screen saver program. Before their entrance, the band also pipes in the eerie sounds of a twentieth century avant guard Russian artist. And their lyrics are generally only about a trivial science fiction story. People who try to read much meaning into their lyrics will most likely be disappointed. They admit themselves that their songs are “dumb and ridiculous,” and their presentation is mostly about ad-lib deliveries and spontaneous improvisation. But this is exactly their point. They intend for people to feel uncomfortable with their music. They almost invoke ridicule - - purposefully! They go through the effort of organizing their own campus concert - - separate from other college sponsored concerts - - in order to provide something different for themselves and for others. Although they appear ludicrous to many onlookers, their efforts are very deliberate and planned for two primary purposes - - to provide an outlet for mindless escape from overbearing frustration and to provide a challenge to the Wheaton community. One band member summarized both perspectives when he said:

I think people are realizing that we're “pushing the envelope,” and we're not just another Dave Matthews Band rip-off. They know we're doing something a little fresh and new. But what's really important to us is not the fresh and new but the fact that it's first a challenging thing and secondly it's an opportunity for us to vent - - to blow off some steam of our frustrations in being here. So it involves that gloomy aspect. On the one hand, it's humorous to provide everyone with a good time to make it go down easier, but at the heart of our message is an element of frustration.

- - Senior, Male

Paradoxically, the “Death Holes” retain both serious and non-serious agendas for their performances. On a superficial level, their ambitions are just to have fun. They want to “let go of any inhibitions” and just “enjoy music, enjoy people, and enjoy life.” Despite their malcontent style, their intentions are never to dismiss the value of conventional art. Rather, they choose to place it in proper perspective - - as finite and incomplete. Thus, any form of art is acceptable for them. One member argued that it was “okay to be weird with our music. We're just having fun.” And the connection between art and human existence is very close for this group. In other words, their expression in art is really an expression of their feelings about themselves - - “it's okay to be weird.” Notice the correlation made

by one band member between their music and breaking down the pretensions of people:

There's a level to what we're doing as a band that is not serious at all. By embracing that and recognizing it for what it is, I think that allows for a deeper level of personal interaction. It's kind of weird, but it's kind of like facing the beast of yourself. Taking yourself too seriously is dangerous, so we break down the pretensions. You can be so pretentious that you can't take yourself seriously. In our last show, we ended by saying that this is the end of your life. It was one girl's birthday, and we told her it was the last birthday of her life.

- - Sophomore, Male

The group's most popular song is entitled, "We're from the future." Consistent with their science fiction themes, the song envisions their band as visitors from the future, here to warn the audience of impending doom. The song is a farcical depiction of the uncertainties of life, offering preposterous glimpses into absurd possibilities of the future. Their intentions with the song seem anything but serious. And yet, there is a very serious dimension to their music. Concealed behind the frivolity is a message of challenge. The founder of the band explained:

I was the one who started this whole thing. I've played in a million bands before - - I'm a music major, and playing in bands is what I enjoy doing. But this is the first band I've ever formed from a concept - - an idea of something I wanted to accomplish together with people of like minds. Last year when sitting at the cafeteria Single's Bar - - which is where most of the Counterculture group congregates - - I thought that I wanted to put together a musical group of people of the oddest people I could find. I wanted to put something together that was confrontational, that was dark and a little unsettling. That's my approach to our performance - - kind of teeter-tottering between the ridiculous and sort of a foreboding gloom. On the one hand, you're making people laugh because you're just being stupid. But on the other hand, there's something really sort of subversive about this. That isn't driven by negativity. It's driven by a desire to challenge for the sake of improving - - for the sake of expanding oneself. . . . That's sort of how I like to think of the Death Holes - - on one hand it's kind of absurd, but on the other hand it's trying to push people, we're trying to slap people around a bit, we're trying to confront them. That's sort of a norm for us for everyday living - - in the conversations that we have, the way that we approach classes, and in the way that we approach other people from other subcultures.

- - Senior, Male

Although the "Death Holes" have taken opportunities to play off-campus - - and have entertained the possibility of infiltrating the pop-art scene in downtown Chicago - - the focus of their efforts has been on Wheaton's campus. They perceive themselves as

visionaries. They have a message for the Wheaton community that is clouded by cynicism and yet driven by idealism. They present a challenge in order to cultivate a change.

One component of their challenge is a plea for acceptance. The realities of being “counterculture” at Wheaton often involves feelings of rejection and alienation from the majority crowd. While often ignored or disregarded, these feelings can at times be discomfoting, especially as related to issues of faith. To some degree, counterculture students want to be considered as part of the community. They want to feel acceptance for who they are as persons. This is reflected in one band member’s analysis:

When I do this band, I feel like I’m saying that I insist on being a part of this community for the reasons that I’m a Christian and because I believe in the same things you do, but I’m not going to be exactly the way you want me to be. I need to be something that I think is right. So I think a really important thing about our group is that we are really up-front. It’s confrontational not in the sense of alienating people so much as showing how alienated we feel.

- - Sophomore, Male

A second component to their challenge is a critique of perceived complacency among Wheaton students. They want students not only to accept them, but also to become more like them. Specifically, they want to move students beyond a “sappy sentimentality,” especially regarding issues of faith. They react against what one member coined as a “cookie-cutter faith - - a simple faith, which is in fact not a simple faith but a simplified faith.” They want students to admit that faith in God is not easy, that doubt is permissible, and that Christianity involves complexity. Thus, there is a subversive element to their rhetoric. This outlook is indirectly communicated through their music. It was also directly articulated in one band member’s comments:

To the degree that it is subversive, it does have a certain destructive capacity in one sense. But I think that can be a positive thing. The reason I came to Wheaton was not to just sort of bask in everything I’d learned and just feel the emotions again and just find a more subtle, sophisticated approach to my faith. I really wanted to understand my faith. In doing that, I’ve found that it’s an extremely complicated thing. No matter how simple someone’s faith might be, Christianity is an extremely complicated existence that only the best minds have really fathomed. But I feel that within such a field of complexity, there’s room for improvement, there’s room for reflection, and there’s room for variety.

- - Sophomore, Male

The “Death Holes” admit that they don’t possess all the answers to life. They

readily acknowledge some of their own shortcomings, and realize that many of their motivations are generated from a sense of “bravado.” One band member confessed that he acted in “extreme measures because I want other people to come and get involved with me. I want to be a revolutionary, but I realize that there are times when I’m not always responsible with that.” However, according to the “Death Holes,” their shortcomings should not overshadow the urgency of their message. In spite of inconsistencies in their behavior, they revel in the importance of nonconformity. One member punctuated the significance of his feelings in this regard:

I don’t want to feel this sense of superiority. I do understand that there are problems that arise with the sort of attitudes that Counterculture people can have. There’s things about us that are obviously problematic, but I don’t want to just become what other types of students expect. I don’t want to just conform to this mainstream image, because it’s suffocating to me to be something different than I am.

- - Sophomore, Male

This nonconformity to the mainstream Wheaton image is a defining characteristic of the “Death Holes.” They want to be different. They want to make a statement, and in that statement, they hope to be convicting. Through their music, they provide an avenue for free expression that often challenges many norms within the Wheaton community. These challenges, although dismissed by many Wheaton students, are appreciated by a contingent of students who struggle with aspects of the institution’s mission. This message of the “Death Holes” serves as a banner cry for some students. In this way, the “Death Holes” cater to and are reflective of a third primary student subgroup on Wheaton’s campus - - the “counterculture” typology.

Characteristics of the Counterculture Student Type

Although comprising only a minority subgroup, the counterculture typology of students is highly visible and vocal on Wheaton’s campus. Their nonconformist style is evident in their dress, in their demeanor, and in their choices of activities. As individuals, they bring a stimulating array of diverse values and behaviors to the ethos of Wheaton College. Yet as a cohort group of students, they are perhaps best depicted as reactionary. They are defined as much by what they react against as by what they stand for. Most of

their criticisms are directed against Wheaton's standards of conduct and moralistic prohibitions. However, their reaction emanates from something much deeper than simply a rejection of college rules. The reaction of counterculture students at Wheaton is really directed against the Evangelical subculture in America.

Interestingly, the vast majority of counterculture students interviewed for this study came from Evangelical Christian homes. They were very familiar with and had participated in the stereotypical mores of Evangelical life: church and youth group attendance, family devotions, personal commitment in Bible study and prayer. Their rejection of the Evangelical subculture was not attributed to ignorance or lack of exposure. Instead, most felt that the Evangelical subculture had failed them in some way. They commonly reported that their religious experience felt unfulfilled or incomplete. For many, attending an Evangelical Christian college was one last attempt on their part or their parent's part to restore hope in their Evangelical heritage. As a result, many came to Wheaton with some degree of reservation.

It is no surprise, then, that counterculture students at Wheaton demonstrate only limited levels of participation in college life or Christian service activities. In questioning their Evangelical heritage, they often reject those practices closely identified with an Evangelical institution (such as a college). Thus, in place of the Evangelical subculture, they create an alternative subculture for their collegiate experience. Rather than just acquiesce in misery, counterculture students typically attempt to express their ideals and frustrations through other mediums. For this reason, they are often characterized as an expressive group.

This group tends to be "darker." They're not quite as Evangelical - - as far as legalism. They might not all hold to the pledge, often testing the limits. This is typical of what we talk about in my literature class as a "Romantic-expressive" person. These are usually people who are confused with things and frustrated with this or that, and express this musically. Or they want to value something that Wheaton's not valuing. It's a lifestyle where they try to get what is missing.

- - Senior, Male

Typical avenues of expression for counterculture students are found through art classes, theater productions, poetry and literature activities or campus musical groups.

Although fewer in number, counterculture students at Wheaton also expressed themselves through a love for outdoor activities. One student referred to these students “granolas”:

The granola crowd kind of relates to the artistic crowd, but the difference is their love of outdoors. And they’re probably just more a crazy group of folks - - into extreme sports and stuff. They dress like they’re ready to go hiking (Northface backpacks, riding expensive bikes, etc.) They want to just do anything. They don’t want to be confined to a direction. They don’t know what they want to do, so they want to get enough done so that they can go skiing or do something pleasurable. They have flippant attitudes about life.

- - Senior, Male

Whatever their means of expression, it is obvious that the counterculture students at Wheaton share distinctive values and behaviors that classify them within a particular typology of students. Regarding values, counterculture students want to be authentically real, they are not afraid to rebel against the status quo, and they appreciate meaningful relationships. Counterculture students also display many unique behaviors - - some more visible (their dress and leisure activities), and some less visible (illegal activity and/or institutional infractions).

Distinctive Values. Any culture establishes a set of accepted norms, perspectives, assumptions, and behaviors that influence the actions of individuals and groups and give meaning to events in particular settings (Geertz, 1973). A counterculture group is defined by its lack of acceptance of these prescribed cultural structures. This is not to say, however, that counterculture groups reject the notion or need for established cultural structures. Rather, they seem to reject the rigidity of a dominant culture’s structures. In other words, when cultural structures hinder or ignore honest appraisal of all cultural dynamics - - both good and bad - - a counterculture group reacts against the perceived insularity and false reality of this culture. What the counterculture group at Wheaton values the most is authenticity about their lives. They want to be real about who they are and what they experience in life. They don’t want to gloss over problems, but feel the need to acknowledge the existence of problems and the pain associated with such. Many in the counterculture group have experienced problems or pain in the dominant culture, and get frustrated with the naivete of some students who have not. As one student explained:

That's probably been my biggest frustration since I've been here - - that a lot of students have grown up in nice Christian families and are just not aware of what students who have grown up in not so nice Christian families or non-Christian families have had to grow up with, and are not sensitive to those things. Particularly with issues like homosexuality or sexual abuse, it frustrates me that a lot of the students here aren't aware of what that is and what that does to people. Especially since it's so common, that bothers me that students will judge other students' behavior that stems from what is perfectly normal behavior for students who are dealing with abnormal occurrences in their lives. And they get attacked for the behavioral problems which turns them even more against Christianity and makes it more difficult to get back to the actual problem itself. The counseling center usually knows what they're doing with that stuff, but it bothers me that students don't know how to identify that in each other. I've noticed this and it hurts me.

- - Junior, Female

Particularly related to issues of faith, counterculture students want to avoid superficiality in their religious experience. This would not be unlike students associated with the Christian service typology who want to be "real" with their faith. However, counterculture students perceive many of the responses and values of Christian service students as shallow and simplistic, and therefore tend to disregard the religious sentiments of Christian service students as fake or hypocritical. One student's assessment illustrated this perception clearly:

Whatever it is they (Christian service students) value, they take to be rather self-evident, and are puzzled when they run into people who don't value whatever it is they value or see things the way they see things. They probably would have a hard time dealing with that. They very much think that whatever it is they think and do is obviously the truth, handed down to them directly from God. "How could anyone not believe this or act this way?" I'll be a bit nasty and say that they value superficiality. Maybe these people are being honest with themselves; maybe not. But they're certainly puzzled if you're honest with them. If one of them asked you "how are you doing," and you weren't doing so well, maybe they would say, "well, let me pray for you about that." Somebody might say, "well, you do that, but I'm not sure what that's going to do, or I have the sense that maybe if you were just here with me or talked with me for a while, and let me know you were my friend and concerned about me, maybe that would do more than if you just prayed for me." And they might think that response was kind of weird - - to kind of directly intervene into some situation rather than thinking that, "oh, God loves us and God takes care of us; so we just need to do this, and God will do it." When, in fact, many people feel that this doesn't seem to be the way things work. Maybe they should. I don't know; but they don't. Then the Wheaton student will say that, "well, they don't work because of something you're doing wrong - - if only you read your Bible more, then this would work for you, then you wouldn't have

any problems, blah, blah, blah.” There’s really nothing to say to that. There’s no way you can be right, because the fundamentalist would say that you’re being stubborn and resisting.

- - Senior, Male

Counterculture students want to be authentic with their faith, and react against the perceived superficiality and simplicity of Christian service students. But counterculture students also want to be “real” about other important issues in life, and struggle with students who become overly concerned about external images and materialistic pursuits. In this way, counterculture students conflict with many students in the college life typology as well. One student’s reaction demonstrates this conviction of counterculture students:

I feel like many of these people (college life) are just petty and that they have so many CD’s and so many this and so many that, and if they ever lost something, they would just freak out. But I’m like, “who cares?” That’s my mind set. I had two really good friends in high school that grew up really poor and from broken homes, and both had turned to drugs and alcohol and everything, and then both got saved. And they were some really neat Christians. They just came with no pretenses. The thing they cared most about were other people. They were crucial for my life. I contribute a lot of who I am to them. I was really drawn to their love, and I got frustrated when I came out here because I saw a lot of people hiding behind everything and I felt like nobody really cared about me. I don’t think it was the wealth of these students that was intimidating, because my dad’s a doctor and he makes a lot of money. I don’t think it was the wealth as much as the attitude towards it. And it was more than wealth. In one sense I was sorry for them because I thought these people don’t know how to love, they don’t know what it is to care about another person and not spend all their time worrying about everything else. And they can’t see past everything else. So in one sense I felt sorry for them, but in another sense I was really upset with them.

- - Senior, Male

For counterculture students, the value of being “real” involves the process of finding one’s identity. Rather than accepting prescribed norms for their values and behaviors, counterculture students strive to be “real with oneself” in identifying their own set of standards and perspectives. In this regard, they encourage the pursuit of inner freedom and self-expression. One respondent gave a honest yet somewhat cynical appraisal of this counterculture value:

It’s important to them (counterculture group) to express themselves in any way possible - - whether valid or not. Important to them is just this existentialist living every moment that they’re in and having everyone get excited that they’re all just alive and being together. I think that sometimes

they want everyone to think that this expression of self is really significant when they haven't really worked at anything. It's like they'll get up and start playing a guitar, and they don't know how to play anything, but it's supposed to be great because they're somehow expressing themselves.

- - Senior, Male

Often times, self-expression is interpreted by others as divisiveness. To express one's thoughts and feelings freely implies that controversial issues and perspectives are frequently mentioned. For the counterculture student, this is interpreted as honest awareness and analysis. However, for many other students, free expression is labeled as unnecessary criticisms or negative attitudes. As such, it is shunned. As reflected in the following student's remarks, counterculture students react against this subtle pressure to conform. Whereas mainstream students accuse them of being negative, counterculture students counter with the very same accusation against the negative influence of a conservative community:

I've always kind of felt that there's something about the community that I had been a part of my whole life that just really had a negative effect - - not only on me, but on everyone in my family. All I really saw was that the thing most under attack was divisiveness. If you're divisive, if you want to see things change, if you want to open things up in different directions - - it's at best approached with a lot of caution. I've always felt that that's had a big affect on why my brother - -who's extremely intelligent - - left his faith. So coming here, I started to sense this same thing more and more. There's this subtle pressure to conform and not step outside of boundaries. I'm in charge of coffee houses this year, and I've just noticed that once you start moving in certain directions, there's incredible amounts of subtle pressure not only to conform to policy but also conform to some standard of holiness. I've just felt really invaded by that - - in a sense almost raped by it. It's trying to get something about me and not really me. And in a sense, I feel like I have been excluded from the picture. It's not like I wouldn't agree necessarily. But I really want to develop my faith to the best of my ability, and I don't think this community is good for that in a lot of ways. I think it has a negative impact on people who may be pushing faith to be something better.

- - Sophomore, Male

Because of their frustration with this pressure to conform, counterculture students often react against boundaries. Thus, a second distinctive value expressed by this group is a desire to rebel; to resist the status quo and willingly fight dogmatic assumptions. They detest anything perceived to be legalistic, and ignore any rules considered overly restrictive. While some may or may not enjoy a good fight, they typically feel compelled to make a

statement - - to rebel in some way. Through their own forms of peer pressure, they reinforce the value of being different, of taking a stand, of acting out what is "true to themselves." This tendency to rebel is often motivated by thoughtful, careful, and intentional responses to particular issues or perspectives. At other times, however, immature and impulsive reactions are the basis for these students' rebellious actions.

A more reflective and serious form of rebellion is generated by a legitimate desire to learn and grow. Some counterculture students possess a real longing for finding meaning in life, but reject what they consider to be easy answers. Thus, they may criticize or disregard some religious practices such as chapel or church attendance, even though they may be carefully scrutinizing their own faith commitment. As one respondent suggested, these reactionary responses are often misinterpreted and misunderstood:

There's a cynicism that resides in this group (counterculture), but also a very reflective side. I think there's also a longing, although it seems like a bitterness in some ways. I would say that's how they are perceived. But for myself having been in that subculture and seeing that there is a longing, I know that in a lot of ways they're just like everyone else, they just look a little different and maybe express themselves a little differently. I would say they have a lot of the same values as far as bringing meaning to their spiritual life, but they just pursue it in a different way than what the mainstream would. I think that's really misunderstood by people. Mainstream students would say that they're not spiritual, but they are very spiritual, it's just expressed in different ways. And I would say they have a distaste for superficiality which is evident in all of their life.

- - Senior, Female

Another thoughtful and intentional form of rebellion is prompted by educational interests. Some counterculture students take it upon themselves to inform others of what they're missing. Inciting conservative students as a form of rebellion is often applauded by counterculture students as an appropriate instructional technique. Observe this student's excitement in taking on the role of a gadfly:

It's the challenge that we love, and if we can win somebody over, if we can get someone to say, "maybe I do need to rethink that," then that is amazing. There's an excitement to be in this rebel group. I think my friends and I like to be gadflies. That was what our radio show was all about. We'd love it when people called up and said, "I'm so offended by what you just said." It would hurt, but there's a part of you that's saying, "man, we stuck it in a tender place, and that's good because they're going to think about it tonight, and they heard what we were saying." That's cool.

- - Senior, Male

Concealed behind some of their developmental and instructional rhetoric, however, are also signs of immaturity. Some counterculture students react in negative fashion simply as a means of securing attention for themselves. They choose rebellion as a means of escape - - an easy “cop-out” at times. Rather than working through their struggles, they’ll try to “forget it all” by leaving their inhibitions behind. Consequently, a significant percentage of the counterculture population experiments with drinking alcohol, smoking, and even illegal drug use, even though these are forbidden practices on Wheaton’s campus. Ironically, rather than leaving Wheaton, many choose to stay. Taking a stand for what they believe and how they behave would mean alienation (both physically and emotionally) from Wheaton’s campus. But staying at Wheaton and playing the “underground” games provide a sense of security and, most importantly, attention from their peers:

Some people I honestly think are just scared to be rebellious anywhere else. At least here, you have the safety net of “you’re not supposed to be rebellious,” so people will seek you out. And I think that’s a safety net for a lot of people. If they were to go somewhere else where this was just the norm, they wouldn’t get near as much attention or near as much reassurance that they couldn’t fall completely apart. It seems that there are people that have grown up with this assumption, so they don’t want to completely cut themselves off from their past, even though they’re in a time when they don’t know what that means. So they will disagree with it, but remain in the place where that’s expected of them, even though there’s the guilt, then the reaction attached to them, because it’s what they know. And at least they’re reacting to something they know rather than venturing into the completely unknown.

- - Junior, Female

Many students in the counterculture group, having come from strict Christian upbringings, see their college experience as an opportunity to “break free” and make their own decisions independently of their parents. However, in their reaction they often over-react, and resort to extreme perspectives or behaviors. As demonstrated by one student’s remarks, these extreme responses are typically ridiculed by others as immature, impulsive, and “not well thought through”:

A lot of these people who tend to rebel grew up in very “Christian” environments and have always been under just a firm hand. Now they finally feel like they have the freedom to make their own decisions, but make poor decisions as a result of that. It makes me sad, but there are some who are not being people of integrity in terms of the pledge or not being people of their word, whether it’s drinking or smoking (and I don’t know

what else goes on), or having sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or whatever. These are just things that I don't think are well thought through. There are people who have been going this direction their whole lives and are wanting to veer away from that, but just as soon as they take one step seem to just flop the other direction. I think a lot of people are inclined to extremes. Probably on this campus they're pretty much ostracized because that's not generally accepted on this campus at all, so they have to stick together in order to justify their behavior.

- - Senior, Female

This student's last remark exposes a third distinctive value endorsed by the counterculture group - - relationships. Counterculture students have difficulty fitting into many student subgroups who don't share their same ideals, so by default, seek out relationships with people most like themselves. As suggested by one respondent, counterculture students crave the opportunities to bond with peers who share the same "rebellious" outlook on life:

These students (counterculture) are just really angry. They really want to forget about a lot of things and be cool - - just kind of hang loose, get in their little automobile and go off and get high. It's their way of having fun here and bonding as best friends. It's the bonding that's important. That's what has brought all of them together as friends to begin with. Like just the other day I was talking to someone and asking them about some new guy that was coming to visit the school and this guy said, "he's one of us." He meant that he did drugs. They've accepted me because they saw me smoking a cigar. So I'm one of them because I'm doing something illegal. That's how they'll decide if they'll be your friend.

- - Freshman, Female

Because counterculture students feel ridiculed and rejected by many student subgroups, they also value relationships as a means of support and sympathy. As expressed by one student, counterculture students are dependent upon these relationships for very practical, personal reasons:

The people that I hang around with are people that are rather reflective, people who are rather accepting of different views and can understand or sympathize with why people would think certain ways. These are people who are definitely into talking about things. Although that sounds like I like people who are well versed in politics and romantic poetry, that's not what I mean. Mostly what I am interested in or crave is talking about personal experience - - general sorts of questions about meaning and purpose and what you think those questions are and how you think you can find some sort of solution to that. Generally, this all stems from the fact (not so much this year which has probably been my best year ever at Wheaton) that I am generally a depressive type of individual. So when I talk about academics and intellectual pursuits, I don't want to give the impression that when I

think these things that they're very abstract questions or very analytic modes of operating. Rather, I think my interests - - philosophical interests - - are very personal, sort of concerned with my own well-being. I don't want to give the impression that I think of myself as some sort of very abstract intellectual person who is only concerned with rational concerns rather than others. Because most things that I do are definitely motivated from emotional, social, personal desperation of sorts. So I tend to hang around with people who can sort of resonate with these sorts of concerns, and have the same sorts of concerns as I do.

- - Senior, Male

Counterculture students know the significance of receiving support, and as a result, place a high priority on extending acceptance and compassion to others who struggle - - creating their own sense of community. In fact, counterculture students frequently mentioned their friendships as the only reason for maintaining enrollment at Wheaton College. One sophomore male stated bluntly, "when it comes down to it, the reason I stay is because there are good people and good friendships here." Their friendship groups provide a welcoming atmosphere - - a place of safety where tolerance in relationships is affirmed. The words of one counterculture student reflected the satisfaction felt by many members in nurturing a sense of group solidarity in which honest expression and behavior could be appreciated:

They (counterculture students) find among their group a more welcoming atmosphere. There's this sense of solidarity with this group. If you don't think just right about certain theological or political or cultural or moral issues, there's no stigma, there's no like "you know, I really feel like I need to rebuke you in the Lord" for your feelings about abortion or anything like that. There's an honest discussion - - people aren't afraid to take positions. There's a real feeling of liberalism - - in a good sense.

- - Senior, Male

Distinctive Behaviors. It is no surprise that counterculture students act in ways that are very distinct from the majority of other students - - they counter the predominant culture. When asked to characterize his group, one counterculture student asserted, "we'll do just about anything, as long as it doesn't look like mainstream." Another observed that, "alternative music and dress is so popular now that these students (counterculture) have to be even more fresh and new with their actions in order to feel different." For this reason, many actions of counterculture students stand out as highly noticeable behaviors on Wheaton's campus.

The most obvious distinction about counterculture students is typically their dress. They look different in physical appearance. They dress casually and often wear second-hand, used clothing. One student's assessment of them is that they don't really care about how they look:

They (counterculture students) don't really care what other people think about them. You can tell by the way they dress. They wear 70's clothes, they wear clothes that are too big or too small, they never shave, and they may not use deodorant. They'll be themselves no matter what. I think in some ways they're trying to make a statement with being more natural. But I think they just pull themselves out of society in a sense and just want to be their own individual. They'll be like, "if you don't like the way I dress - - my long scraggly hair and my smelly body - - then that's too bad, because I am who I am."

- - Senior, Male

Counterculture students want to be accepted for who they are, not for how they dress. Ironically, their preoccupation with looking different often causes many to be just as concerned about their appearance as those whom they criticize. One student elaborated upon how intentional and yet not artificial some of these students can be regarding their appearance:

They (counterculture students) put a lot of purpose into everything they do. They dress strikedly I would say. Many focus on having actual hairstyles. My hair just grows out of my head and I just keep it out of my face. But they're very much into presenting themselves as "this is who I am" and they have hair that is styled in a certain way (not that they take forever to do it). But girls will wear really dark lipstick and really short hair a lot of times. And they have certain accessories. A lot of times they have clothing that is from other countries. When I was into art, I was very much aware of how I dressed, and people could tell that I was an artist. They would ask me, "are you an artist" because of the way I dressed. You're just very aware of how you present yourself. You're so in touch with colors and what meanings they have for you. You're just very purposeful about the colors you wear together because you may want to express something. I would just say that a lot more thought goes into their appearance than maybe the normal person. It seems like that could be something that's very superficial, but in a lot of ways it's not because they're very particular and don't want to be false. They realize all these different ways of expression, so they don't want to be false with their expression. So they're very purposeful about how they present themselves.

- - Senior, Female

Another distinctive behavior among this group is their casual attitudes about life. Because they want to be genuine about their thoughts and feelings, they try to avoid any

signs of pretense; they do not “put on performances.” They often label themselves as “laid-back” and “easygoing about life.” They’ll spend countless hours in apartments, houses, or even in the cafeteria just “hanging out” and “wasting time” with friends. One favorite activity frequently observed on campus involves students standing in a small circle of friends and kicking a “hacky sack” back and forth to each other. Life for a counterculture student seems to be a continual exercise in avoiding tension and stress. Some even look for ways to be alone, while others seek some form of outrageous outlet. One student, when stereotyping a “granola” type of counterculture student, highlighted this wild, crazy student persona:

There’s the Granola group. If I had to stereotype them, I would say they are the wild, wilderness kind of people. . . . They shout a lot. I think they’re people who really enjoy wilderness activities, and so that bonds them in a visceral way. It’s an acceptable rebellion. It’s not anything that anyone would say is bad, but it’s definitely different from what most people are into. But the Colorado Rockies type of thing is very trendy right now, not just at Wheaton College, but among our generation. So obviously there’s going to be some of those here. It’s rebellion from the sedentary, conservative lifestyle into a wild and active one. I guess my main stigma about them would be that I would compare it to a Mountain Dew commercial where everybody’s running around screaming and then having all this fun with the racy guitars, people jumping down mountains with bicycles - - let’s do it, let’s have some fun.

- - Senior, Male

Of course, “wild activity” in many forms is not permitted on Wheaton’s campus (drinking alcohol, illegal drugs, premarital sexual activity, etc.), so a second set of distinctive counterculture behaviors are covert actions that are less visible and intentionally concealed from the majority campus population. These actions represent many stereotypical behaviors on American college campuses that function as social outlets for students. Most of this behavior occurs in groups, although the groups are carefully scrutinized for any potential “narcs” or “traitors.” The range of questionable behaviors could vary even within the counterculture group. All counterculture students admitted to dancing (either in clubs or in private living quarters), most admitted to drinking, gambling, and smoking, and some admitted to illegal drug use and/or premarital sexual activity (homosexual or heterosexual). Aware of the college’s institutional policies on these practices, most counterculture students seek opportunities to get off campus, but some

choose to participate even within campus residential settings (apartments, houses). As one student indicated, these “rebellious” behaviors become a source of identity for many counterculture students:

There are groups of people that hang out together, and most people know (unless you're oblivious to it) that they're drinking or dropping acid or whatever. But that group is still so few. I guess it's not significant in numbers but significant in that it's their identifying factor. They typically go off campus. Or they go to friends' homes in the area when parents are away. And a lot of them do it in their rooms - - even in the residence halls. But most of it is off-campus. At Crestview apartments, there's a party like every Friday night.

- - Junior, Male

In reality, counterculture students who do participate in a full range of illegal or controversial behaviors are small in number. A student survey conducted in the spring semester of 1996 revealed that only 15 percent of the Wheaton student population anonymously admitted to drinking alcohol during the academic school year (Hufford, 1996). Most of that 15 percent would represent students in the counterculture group. Predictably, an even smaller percentage of students were involved in illegal drug use at Wheaton. Yet even though small in number, counterculture students seem quite assured of their justification for ignoring some college policies, particularly as related to the Statement of Responsibilities. A critic of counterculture students offered this rationale for the group's behavior:

I think it's about being fun, being relaxed, and not being a tight-wad Christian. They (counterculture students) don't want to be Puritans. Maybe their friends make fun of them that they go to a school where they can't dance and somehow they want to show that they're not closed-minded. A lot of people try or do things that they know are wrong because they don't want to close themselves off or say that they never tried things. Now they're arguing that they can be whatever they want. You're supposedly close-minded because you're not trying it. “It's my freedom to do whatever I want.” It's almost as if people look down on you for being closed to certain things.

- - Junior, Male

When confronted about breaking college policies (or even biblical mandates), counterculture students typically offer one of two responses. The first is to admit their own weakness and culpability for refraining from certain impulses. As if to take on the role of a victim, they excuse their behaviors on the grounds of being unable to overcome undue

pressure. For example, when discussing premarital sexual activity, one respondent acknowledged the resignation of students in not being able to restrain themselves:

It's almost as though students are resigned to it - - "we're going to do it, so . . ." They don't really justify it, but they figure that since they are committed to this person, it's more okay. So you have the couples that are just finally resigned to using birth control to try to be more responsible. But with that responsibility goes the resignation. They do think about it, but they just feel like they can't meet up to a high expectation. Eventually the temptation gets too strong, and then it happens four or five times, and they know that the next time they're alone together, they're going to do it. So they just decide to be responsible. So it's not so much a rejection of the mandate as much as saying that they just can't keep it.

- - Junior, Male

A second response is more defiant. Some counterculture students will disregard institutional policies as outdated, ill-informed, or worse yet, vindictive. They criticize many institutional guidelines for focusing upon "trivial" issues instead of matters of "real" importance. Consequently, they justify their behaviors as obedience to the "spirit of the law" instead of the "letter of the law." Decisions are based upon individual judgments and interpretations rather than on accordance to external mandates. As reflected in the following students' remarks, counterculture students want to feel independent and responsible for their own value and behavioral choices:

My feeling on the pledge (Statement of Responsibilities) is that I don't know if it's so clear-cut as to make it easily understood. I think it's a lot more complicated than what people make it out to be. . . . In one sense, I'm just sick of it. I'm just tired of these parameters. I'm tired of being defined by something that I know is not that big of a deal. The people who are telling me these things don't even really understand why. They can't even give me a good reason sometimes why something is important. I think what people call conscience isn't always conscience. That may sound like a huge cop-out. And I can understand that sometimes it is. But personally I come from a background that I had a conscience that just would not give up. It was torturous. Everybody was telling me that I was doing good stuff, but it was really unsatisfying for me. I felt like I was being sincere, but it wasn't working. So I just petered out. Since then, I've just had a problem getting back into a mode of recognizing some things that probably I should recognize as valid.

- - Sophomore, Male

Practically speaking, I'll be honest, after three years of the pledge, I've just decided that this year I'm not on it. I'm getting to the age where I need to start being responsible for myself. . . . When it comes to my own personal integrity, I must admit that I need to be careful. But as far as I'm concerned, if I'm not doing this like every night, then hey, "God made wine

to gladden the heart of man.”. . . I recognize that there’s a breach of integrity and I’m going to be held accountable for that. But I also recognize that there are a lot of ways in which the pledge is flawed. But for myself, I’ve made a decision to take responsibility for myself, and not depend on the school to do that for me.

- - Senior, Male

Upon matriculation, all students must sign a “Statement of Responsibilities” form as a written pledge of promised allegiance to designated biblical imperatives and institutional policies. As counterculture students consider “breaking the pledge,” the most disturbing issue in their minds is not the actual act of violating a rule, but rather the act of compromising personal integrity. Yet, even though many struggle in their resolve with issues of integrity, they often dismiss their apprehension as unnecessary worry over a false sense of morality created on campus. Once again, their concern is directed toward understanding “what are the real issues.”

I feel really manipulated with the issue of integrity. I’d have to admit that it’s true - - there is a level of integrity that someone gives up when they break the pledge. But in one sense I think it’s really a manipulative way to handle what are the real issues. You can never get past that, you’re just dealing with this issue of following. I don’t know how to deal with it because, quite honestly, I don’t want to go to a school with people passing out all over the place. I don’t want to go to a school where it’s just partying all the time. That’s not why I’m going to college. But I don’t want to be at a school that doesn’t understand why they’re acting the way they’re acting. I don’t think people here really understand the nature of what it means to smoke or drink. During the summers I smoke and drink, but I don’t think that morally in themselves, either is wrong. . . . I’ve broken the law by drinking, but it’s sort of like speeding. I don’t over-do it, so it’s not that bad.

- - Sophomore, Male

True to their independent nature, counterculture students like to take matters into their own hands. Because they are most unlike the dominant institutional and student culture at Wheaton, they have to work the hardest in defining their own subcultural values and beliefs. But they are persistent in their efforts - - continually striving in their pursuit of anything “real” in life. They try to be “true to themselves” in discovering and affirming their own individual uniqueness. They also endeavor to understand the numerous

intricacies to life - - both good and bad - - in order to grasp what is “real” and most important about human existence. As a proclaimed antithesis to the Christian service subculture, counterculture students argue that their faith is more honest and not based upon superficial responses to difficult questions. In their quest to be “real,” counterculture students are also less inhibited to disregard established institutional policies and guidelines. As one loyal adherent summarized, “the desire to be more real outweighs the concern for doing right.”

In some ways, counterculture students are not afraid to take an activist role. As exemplified by the “Death Holes,” some student groups publicly make a statement regarding their frustration with Evangelical subculture and Wheaton institutional prerogatives. Some even act in extreme, subversive ways in order to raise controversy and prove a point. Others willfully disobey “rules” at Wheaton to indicate their independence and disregard for authority.

While counterculture students advocate “rebellious” attitudes and opinions, they remain fairly compliant with behavioral guidelines - - at least externally. Counterculture students value their relationships at Wheaton too much to jeopardize leaving the institution. They value their identification and acceptance with similar-minded friends, but they also value a sense of relationship with their past heritage. They hope to maintain some continuity between their childhood faith and their developing awareness of who they need to be. For these reasons, they are less likely to openly defy institutional authority. The threat of dismissal from the institution is powerful enough to prevent many outward acts of rebellion. Instead, they resort to more passive-aggressive behaviors. Their’s is a sort of silent resistance. The hidden world of “underground” Wheaton is alive and well, but it remains hidden. Counterculture students choose to participate in two “worlds” simultaneously - - in the dominant culture of Wheaton visibly, and in the underground subculture of Wheaton invisibly. The two worlds are often mutually exclusive.

A “marginalized” subculture of students also exists essentially separate from the dominant culture at Wheaton, but unlike their counterculture companions, marginalized students do not voluntarily remove themselves from the dominant culture. Rather, they feel excluded. This group will be the focus of the last subculture discussion.

The Marginalized Student Type at Wheaton College

The William Osborne Society: A Marginalized Subculture

February is Black History Month in the United States - - an opportunity to recognize and remember the accomplishments and culture of many Black Americans. On Wheaton's campus, the Office of Minority Affairs takes this opportunity to provide various educational and social opportunities underscoring the significance of Black culture. One student group that assists in this process and serves as an extension of the Office of Minority Affairs is the William Osborne Society. Named after the first African-American graduate of Wheaton College, this student organization exists to promote identity among Black-American students and to create greater awareness of Black-American culture on Wheaton's campus. The society is coordinated by a six member cabinet of students consisting of a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, a secretary, and two special events coordinators. For this year's celebration of Black History month, the cabinet planned a number of campus events. These included: (1) a Chicago excursion to visit the Museum of African-American History and a dinner at one of Chicago's most popular "soul-food" diners; (2) a campus prayer time; (3) an organized visit to a local African-American church; (4) a cultural "coffeehouse" for poetry reading, jazz music, and open mic; (5) a guest speaker lecture; (6) a presentation and discussion of a documentary film on three African-American writers; and (7) an African Dinner Fellowship on campus.

This last event was an opportunity for Wheaton students to taste a variety of "African style" food items from different African or Caribbean countries - - including Nigeria, South Africa, and Jamaica. Prepared by members of the William Osborne Society, the dinner consisted of such dishes as jellof rice, fried cabbage, curry chicken, potato/spinach porridge, pounded beef, and bush tea - - all made to the specifications of certain native African or Caribbean recipes. The event was held on a Sunday evening in a large meeting room on the ground level floor of Fischer Hall (the largest residence hall on campus). The food was placed on one serving table and students had the opportunity to select their own portions. Native South-African music played in the background as students filled their plates and made their way to small cafe tables situated along one wall of

the room.

The atmosphere was casual and relaxed. Nobody was visibly “in charge” nor did anyone give directions for the evening. No presentation was planned - - only informal conversations around cafe tables. Conversations were initiated with typical “small talk,” often leading to dialogue about the various food items. As the dinner progressed, students also discussed various cultural differences and distinctions within the United States but also in other countries. However, for the most part, these conversations did not have a serious tone. The evening was a chance for students to share stories about themselves and tease and laugh at each other along the way. It was a friendly environment, and it didn’t take long to realize that the evening was not as much about food and culture as it was about being together with friends.

An atmosphere of good food, great fun, and tremendous socializing is not unlike many other student events on campus. But one thing was conspicuous about this event. For a college campus that is predominantly composed of white students, this event was noticeable for its lack of white student representation. And even the two white students who did attend were missionary kids raised in African cultures. Such a poor turnout was startling, given that signs had been posted around campus announcing that the event was open to the entire student body and students knew that the campus dining commons is closed on Sunday evenings. Presumably, an ethnic meal for a small price (three dollars) in a convenient location would be appealing to many students. But this was not the case for the African Dinner Fellowship. The few students who did choose to attend were predominantly ethnic minority students at Wheaton. Some minority students expressed disappointment over the poor white student turnout, but others were not surprised, having witnessed white students’ limited interest in minority affairs. These minority students, it appears, have come to accept a “marginalized” status in relationship to the dominant student culture at Wheaton.

In reality, the response of many white students on Wheaton’s campus to the African Dinner Fellowship is similar to how many white Americans respond to multiculturalism and diversity issues. Most are not antagonistic toward minority groups as much as indifferent to them. They understand the significance of racism in American society, but

believe that it is not a problem on a “friendly campus” like Wheaton’s. Such a belief, however, may be rooted in students’ limited definition of racism as the most overt types of prejudice. Accordingly, many have a difficult time understanding why minority students feel so uncomfortable on campus. From their perspective, minority students accentuate racial tensions on campus by congregating together in small, “separatist” groups. Further, many majority students reported a feeling of awkwardness when trying to relate to minority students. Although they tried to befriend minority students in order to prove to themselves and others that they were accepting of others, many felt, as one student articulated, that it was the responsibility of minority students to reciprocate their actions:

Some of the diverse students have come in here and made their diversity more of an issue. They are a minority which is unfortunate, but I don’t think there is as much of a dilemma between us as maybe sometimes is presented, besides numbers. I think minority students feel comfortable with only their own race and I don’t know if it’s the way they’ve been brought up, but it seems like they think that everybody else has it all wrong. I know there’s a large Korean / Koinonia group and I’m friends with some of them, but they’re all each other’s best friends. I think it’s that way with the black population, too. I hang around with them and I do stuff with them too, but they’re all each others’ best friends which is kind of frustrating for me because it seems like they’re the ones who are calling for constant equality and yet I don’t know what they’re doing to help the issues except for more talk about it and make it more of a big deal . Excluding themselves isn’t going to be the answer especially as a minority. We have to make an effort as a majority to step out and reach out to those people. That’s important but it’s essential that those minorities don’t isolate themselves which sometimes happens.

- - Junior, Male

For the most part, “reciprocation” is defined by the majority student as “assimilation” into the majority culture. They feel that minority students should simply learn to feel comfortable with their environment. The contentions of some majority students reflect a very traditional, conservative perspective for maintaining status quo. They insist that “if something isn’t broken, why fix it.” Such definitions of value are based upon their own cultural assumptions. Consequently, they have a hard time accepting the need for change. These sentiments were clearly and honestly reflected in the following student’s assessment:

They’ve all kind of banded together in the sense of being minorities at Wheaton - - be they Asian, Black, Hispanic, whatever. They all come together, which probably gives them more clout. Most are concerned about

getting more minorities here to Wheaton. Because they're minorities here, it seems like they might feel an obligation to "educate" the rest of us as to what we've done in the past and what we need to do to eradicate racism. Whether we do or not, I'm not sure. But I think some of their arguments are not always grounded on a good foundation. A lot of them want to have a curriculum that has more to do with such things as Black history and more minorities. And my view of that is "don't change what Wheaton is just for the sake of diversity." Diversity for diversity is really no good. If diversity enables Wheaton to become a better institution, then that's great. But most people don't want to change Wheaton as far as outlook. We would all like to make it more appealing to minorities, but in doing so, Wheaton's focus should not change. What they teach should not change. So the arguments for a broader scope in historical basis or having something put in general education, I think that's unfair, because when people come to college here, and things are required of them, they're not coming to be taught how racially insensitive they are. They're coming for a historical Christian education in a classic sense. At their own choosing, I think it's good if they could pick up some courses along the way. But I don't think that should be mandatory.

- - Senior, Male

Students associated with the William Osborne Society are not oblivious to these perceptions. And although many realize that they are scrutinized by white students for their exclusive friendships, they also feel misunderstood for their actions. As one African-American student explained, these friendship groups are intended to provide support for minority students, not to "shun" the rest of the community at Wheaton.

I think their big question is "why." I hear all the time, "why do they always have to hang out together, why do they always have to eat with each other, why do you change when you're with them, why this, why that?" Sometimes it's not very nice when they ask "why." We talk about community a lot and not being received and just wanting to be a part of the whole thing. But then they say, "okay, if you talk about that so much and you fuss about it, why is it that you always separate yourselves?" I guess we're just friends because we like each other. We invest a lot of time in each other. Then because we are such a minority, when we do come together as a group, it seems as though we separate ourselves. Admittedly we do in order to just not have to explain to others what we're going through, but it's not intended to shun the community we truly believe we want to have.

- - Sophomore, Female

In actuality, most African-American students do not feel that they are excluding others as much as being excluded by white students on campus. They feel pressured to accept the cultural assumptions and values of the majority population, but do not sense much if any desire from majority students to accept the cultural backgrounds of minorities.

As one African-American student explained, "I think [white] students expect us to assimilate with the rest of campus and do the same things they all do. But cultural assimilation for a black person means the same thing as cultural death." From this student's perspective, the indifference of majority students to cultural backgrounds of black students is interpreted as a type of rejection, and in some cases, a form of racism at Wheaton College.

Admittedly, racism at Wheaton comes in only small doses. Yet, for minority students, even minor infractions can be just as troubling because they often go unnoticed or unacknowledged as a problem. Although few if any of their references are intended as derogatory, majority students are often criticized by minority students as naive or insensitive to various perceptions or assumptions. For example, a cabinet member of the William Osborne Society protested the sweeping generalizations made about "black" students at Wheaton:

What I've experienced is just references to blacks or to black things or to black perceptions that are negative and disruptive. It's not daily, but it happens regularly. As far as a negative situation, that might only happen about once every two months or so. But I think the affects of racism on this campus are more that I'm made to feel black all day every day, especially in class or chapel. If there is a chapel speaker who comes in that is black, all of a sudden I start to get nervous and think, "okay, you better do a good job if you're representing all of us blacks." So you're made to recognize that you are black, and you're not your own individual - - not like majority students.

- - Junior, Male

Another African-American student alluded to some of the damaging effects of these subtle forms of racism. Because of assumptions and perceptions from other students, she felt inferior and overly self-conscious about the color of her skin:

I just feel inferior a lot of the times like I shouldn't be here, like I'm not smart enough, or I'm just here to fill a quota. No one has to just come out and say that for us to feel it. The self-consciousness comes about because the people around campus perceive you as being different, so you start to self-examine and look inward and compare yourself, and that kind of pain has to have an outlet in some way. I would be quite happy to be an oblivious Wheaton student. It would be nice. It would make life much easier. But because of the color of my skin, I stand out.

- - Sophomore, Female

Occasionally, minority students reported more overt forms of racism at Wheaton.

However, these were often infrequent and typically unrelated to the college campus. Most of the minority students, especially African-American students, experienced different racist interactions with people or businesses in the local community. Even though not directly associated with the college, these experiences often had a significant impact upon their educational endeavors at Wheaton. For example, one African-American student cited various encounters with racial prejudice when going outside Wheaton's campus with a group of minority friends:

A lot of times when we go out, we have these weird incidents happen. Like at the Kirk club, we had this guy come up and accuse us of stealing a remote to the TV and threatened to call the police if we didn't cough it up. We didn't take it, but we left anyway. You just cannot escape that here at Wheaton. Or don't go to a store together, because they'll think you're in a big group or a gang and are there to cause trouble.

- - Senior, Female

For the most part, African-American students felt that racism within the college was more subtle. Yet, even though racist acts were seldom intentional, African-American students were still frustrated with the lack of sensitivity displayed for many minority issues on Wheaton's campus. As reflected in the following student's remarks, examples of institutional insensitivity were easily identified:

Today was another example. My professor suggested that, even though classes were canceled on Martin Luther King's Holiday, we could meet anyway. It hurt me because that was a holiday very important to me. Why would you say that if you knew that's a holiday and no classes were on that day? And plus, the same thing happened last year and it got written up in the Record and everything, and still she says it again. Would they do that on July 4?

- - Sophomore, Female

In short, African-American students at Wheaton believe that their cultural interests, beliefs, and values are overlooked. In many ways, they feel "marginalized" by the institution and by other students. As one junior male put it, "I wonder what would happen if we just all transferred out one semester and all the black people on campus were gone. I bet nobody would even notice that we were gone?" Even though minority students are considered a part of Wheaton College, many felt marginalized within this community. One student's description of an "invisible syndrome" is quite revealing in this regard:

I don't fit in because I'm black. This is a biggie. When I talk with my

black friends, we definitely know why we don't fit in here. There's a tendency to be invisible. The invisible syndrome is kind of like the invisible man. You're doing everything. You're in the right places. It's not as though you're not there. But people seem to pass you by. Their eye contact is not there, and this is so dramatic. You do things, and yet they don't see you doing them. It's amazing when you bust your butt doing them, but yet you're not recognized. It's like certain things are omitted. . . . I see a definite problem with the racial reconciliation that goes on at this campus and at Christian schools. We went to a multicultural student leadership conference, and it was hilarious. We all went to the same schools, but in different vicinities. Everything was so exact, and it seems like if you have that many people in that many different places all saying the same things, there's got to be something up. It's not just like a couple of people are making noise and a couple people don't understand what's going on. We're talking about the way you are responded to in classes. We're talking about the resources that are not there that you need. We're talking about the Senior Banquet when nobody got superlatives among the minority students for things that they are noted for doing. Therefore next year you won't see hardly any minorities at the Senior Banquet. That's invisible syndrome. You don't fit in. You think you're fitting in all right until it just hits you - - something's amiss. We're talking about little things that we do just as much if not more than other people do, and we're really good at them but are not recognized. It's a slap in the face every time that happens. You just curl up even more and say, "okay, I don't want to do this anymore."

- - Junior, Female

Characteristics of the Marginalized Student Type

Feelings of being "marginalized," however, are not just restricted to African-American students at Wheaton College. Other student groups also expressed similar feelings of being "invisible" on campus. Because most of these feelings related to cultural differences, the marginalized students tended to represent most ethnic minority students (predominantly Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanic-American students) and students who were raised in different cultural settings (for example, Wheaton enrolls a number of missionary kids who grew up in different international settings). It should be noted that feelings of marginalization were based upon cultural and not ethnic differences. In other words, some ethnic minority students who accepted and participated in various aspects of the "majority culture" did not report the same marginalized feelings as other ethnic minority students. Conversely, white students who were raised in cross-cultural settings often reported struggles of "fitting in" with the majority culture.

Given these distinctions, it was obvious in this study that certain marginalized

student groups shared similar values and behaviors that characterized them as a particular typology of students at Wheaton. Because they felt rejected by the majority culture, marginalized students valued the support and security they found in smaller minority groups, valuing them as a resource for developing their own identity as well as for representing their own unique cultural status. Moreover, most marginalized students displayed similar behavioral characteristics. Not surprisingly, these students devoted considerable time and energy to one another - - providing support, spending time together, and finding outlets for having fun. If sufficiently supported within their individual group, marginalized students also demonstrated an outward focus. They would not only work hard to prove themselves to the majority culture, but they also would seek opportunities to educate or enlighten other students regarding cultural dynamics and differences.

Distinctive Values. A number of ethnic minority students frequently entertained the possibilities of transferring to another institution. For some, the frustrations of being a marginalized student jaded their perspective of Christian higher education. Most appreciated the educational atmosphere and Christian emphasis of the institution but felt a tremendous burden to resolve additional sets of social and emotional issues as ethnic minority students. Particularly given their small numbers on campus, fair representation in all campus decisions was an important issue for many minority students.

Interestingly, despite their frustrations, the graduation rate for minority groups at Wheaton is fairly high.⁷ To a large degree, once enrolled, marginalized students stay at Wheaton. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the frustration level of marginalized students escalates only after considerable time at the institution. Thus, minority students who are well into their educational program at Wheaton often choose to “stick it out” in order to avoid the hassle of transferring to a different institution. High retention rates may also be attributed to the satisfaction minority students derive from their small group experiences at Wheaton. Like other subcultural student groups at Wheaton, minority students greatly value their friendships. In short, they appreciate the community aspect of

⁷ According to statistics collected by Wheaton College’s Office of Minority Affairs, for all ethnic minority students who enrolled at Wheaton College as freshmen, graduation rates over the last ten years fluctuated between 78% and 84%.

their small groups - - something lacking from their involvement with the majority culture. These small groups were important to minority students for two primary reasons - - they offered a crucial source of support to minority students and they served as a catalyst for personal identity development.

Matriculation at Wheaton College can be its own cross-cultural experience, and for some minority students, it is their first encounter with a different cultural setting. Having come from unique cultural backgrounds, many find the adjustment to different cultural assumptions and practices quite difficult. Feeling like foreigners in a strange land, many minority students crave some type of support from others. They need this support because they often feel isolated from other campus groups. As one minority student articulated, many minority students feel like white students simply do not understand or appreciate their cultural differences.

College makes you realize more and more your ethnic background because you're totally taken away from it and totally submerged in this suburban, American society. You're totally submerged in it more than when you're at home, so I've realized more and more how much my ethnicity has formed me. But at the same time, I just don't think the [white] students at Wheaton understand this - - that I could call my aunt and she would drive out here and do things for me that only their mom would do. And I can ask things of my aunt that they would never think of, because their aunts are distant whereas my family is very close. I've never had a babysitter. My grandmother and aunt took care of me my whole life. And I ate different food. There's just a lot of different things that people don't understand about a Hispanic heritage. People don't understand what it's like to live in an apartment where you really don't have enough room for your family and how much stress that causes for your family. People don't understand what it's like to really not have money, like you don't know where you're going to get food. I have memories of that, but that's not part of people's mind-set here.

- - Junior, Female

In contrast, many minority students greatly appreciate their contact with peers from similar cultural backgrounds because they believe that these students understand their life experiences. In this sense, minority students are often very dependent upon these minority support groups. As one student explained:

We value each other a lot. It's as if the way we breathe is through each other. You can tell this by what my friend called "Black attraction." I was walking and saw a friend and stopped to say "hi." Then we saw these other two people who were black, and they came over, then another two came

over. It's just like when you see each other you just mesh. You seek each other out wherever you go, because they'll understand. Even if they don't understand you completely, they have a frame of reference where they can more easily understand. Because other times you have to explain yourself to most Wheaton students - - how you feel and why you feel it - - and explain why something upset you. You just have to explain all the time, whereas with my friends it won't even matter what you said, they'll know what you mean. And our humor is very much the same. Like if I'm in another group, I won't find some things funny - - I won't get it completely. I'll understand what the joke is, but the punch-line is not all the funny to me. Whereas if I'm with my friends, it can get crazy. And I don't have to be quiet. I can be as loud as I want. And I don't have to be upset wondering what others are thinking about me. I can just be who I am.

- - Sophomore, Female

Indeed, minority students at Wheaton value the support they receive from their small groups because it allows them to be genuine with others and real with themselves. Minority students cherish transparent and honest relationships where they can experience acceptance for who they really are. Relationships that demonstrate openness and honesty along with unconditional support are very important to them. Even one "outsider" (a Caucasian student) recognized this characteristic about African-American students:

One of the big differences with my black friends is that they really don't care about putting on a front - - they'll tell you how they feel whenever. They're not going to put on a facade to make everyone else feel better. That's been a challenge to me of all my status quo (which was really just cultural) and just having that challenged by them. They'd say, "you don't have to do that." There's just a lot of expectations and obligations that I thought I had to meet in different areas, whether academically or just if I made a commitment to a group, so I really should go do this. And they would just come out and say, "Why? If you're tired or sick, don't do it." Even something as simple as class attendance, come hell or high water I would go to class, unless I was on my deathbed. But if they aren't feeling good, they just won't go. And I don't want to just separate them out. I'm sure there's a lot of white students that do that too. But I haven't met them as much or it isn't viewed as well with the white culture.

- - Senior, Female

In addition to support, minority students also value their small minority groups as a resource for their own personal identity development. Although marginalized from the majority culture, these groups helped minority students to develop self-worth and confidence with regard to their own unique identity. As one minority student testified, they learned how to feel good about themselves in these small groups:

This group appreciates the fact that we're black. We thank God for it and

try to discover the many things that are beautiful about us. To be black in this society is a hard thing. Any time you go to see a movie, there are a lot of blacks portrayed negatively. So there's a lot that you see that makes you ashamed to be black. So it's important to have a support group of like-minded people to make you feel good about who you are. It wasn't a mistake that God chose to make you black.

- - Senior, Female

In the end, identification with a minority group is empowering for minority students at Wheaton. It provides the support necessary for finding a "home" within foreign territory. But it also provides the impetus for minority students to learn about the importance of their own personal identity. From there, minority students are better equipped to offer something back to the majority culture. These sentiments were clearly articulated by a member of the William Osborne Society:

Being a part of William Osborne is empowering for me. I think a big part of William Osborne is being around other people who I can glean from and learn what she feels and what her reaction might be - - just getting a lot of knowledge from other similar students. But I think as we get knowledge about one another, and as we get knowledge about who we are as African-Americans, that doesn't do anything but help the other people on this campus. I think that's the way we help the campus. When you don't know who you are, when you don't know how important you are in a situation, a lot of times other people won't recognize it, and what will happen is they'll treat you as if you're unimportant. They won't learn anything from you. You won't learn anything from them. But when you begin to understand that you're an important part of the picture, then you begin to act a certain way and to be important and to stand out to people. And they begin to say, "hey, she's important to me, she's important to this situation that we're in together, therefore I can't live without her, and therefore I'm going to try to understand her concerns and serve her."

- - Senior, Female

Distinctive Behaviors. As marginalized participants in the student culture, many minority students at Wheaton maximize their involvements with smaller identity groups and minimize their involvements with the more general majority culture. That said, some minority students choose not to accept the status quo and a marginalized status. These students assume an activist role in order to improve their standing within the community and to inform the majority culture about their concerns. A cabinet member of the William Osborne Society captured the essence of this inward and outward focus when she described her vision for their society:

I wanted to be involved in it (William Osborne Society) for me personally and for the rest of the black students so that we would have an organization where there is definitely going to be other black students that they can talk to, and so they know there are other students who are concerned about their time while they're here at Wheaton. I wanted to make sure that the other black students felt like they had a support group, at least with the cabinet, that they could call us anytime. Also, for the rest of campus, I wanted them to be informed and know what concerns black students and what are things we're thinking about or going through - - just things about our culture that are important to us.

- - Sophomore, Female

Typically, minority students did not develop an outward campus focus until they felt secure within their smaller minority groups. As they felt supported from their friends and learned to feel good about their own self-identity, they became better equipped and empowered to assert their importance in the community. With renewed confidence in themselves, they not only accepted the challenge of relating to the majority culture, but they also learned to appreciate the challenge. In their daily endeavors they sought ways to "educate" others about the values and assumptions of minority students. As revealed by one minority student, this awareness of a mission or purpose to their educational experience only further contributed to their sense of self-worth:

I think black students stay here because they start getting unselfish glimpses of our purpose here. It would be so easy to go to an all black school, but we would be just like the white students that come here. They're in their comfort zone - - it's no big deal. But I've really started to see what God wants to do here through me. I'm not saying that I'm going to change the school, but I think there are some things here that only I can do for this school. For that reason, I'm here and I'm here to stay. It becomes difficult in chapel when I look around and I can't find a face like mine. Sometimes I've broken down in the cafeteria because I didn't see anyone like me. And you start to say, "God, what am I doing here?" But I know that God has me here to help this campus, and he also wanted to teach me something along the way.

- - Senior, Female

In order to "educate" the majority population, many minority students said that they needed to develop credibility with the majority population - - to "play on the majority student's home field," so to speak. To accomplish this, many strive to "prove themselves" to the majority culture. Thus, similar to counterculture students, minority students simultaneously participate in two different "worlds" - - the dominant culture of Wheaton and the marginalized subcultures of minority groups. Juggling these identities and tasks

can often be a difficult process, as this student testified:

My freshman year I felt like I had to prove that I wasn't ignorant and that I wasn't here on some kind of scholarship or affirmative action thing. Because if I were, there'd be a lot more students here on affirmative action. But I felt like I had to work twice as hard. Being female and being black I thought that I had to top everybody and be better than everybody just to keep my head above water. To some extent I think I do, not only here, but just in this country. It's been hard, because I know that people have preconceived ideas about me that won't change. I don't assume that people shouldn't have preconceived ideas about people because I do. But these are negative and hurtful ideas. And I haven't had the best experience all the time with students here.

- - Junior, Female

Attempting to "educate" others and "prove themselves" is a very tiresome experience for many minority students at Wheaton. Many do not seek to take an activist role, but feel forced into it because of inaccurate assumptions within the majority culture. Observe the strain in this student's voice with having to constantly serve as the "spokesperson" for black culture in his classes:

The pressures of being a minority student at Wheaton have put me in the position of looking at every relationship that I have and every conversation that I have and every word that I even say and weighing it to ask, "what is this doing and what am I doing and how is this or that counteracting me or me counteracting that?" And that builds up and eventually tires you out. You can deal with the big issues, but then individually when it comes down to the small issues, it takes a lot more work. In one class, my professor was talking about issues that related to races, and whenever black people or black anything was mentioned, he would always look at me. I didn't take that as an insult, but just that I'm the only black face in the class. So that continuing referencing as the voice of Black America gets old. He didn't do it to be mean, at least I don't think he did, but I was constantly being referenced for all minorities - - "this is what they all think, what do you think." So it's hard to always have to play this role.

- - Senior, Male

Given the difficulty of this role, it is not surprising that many minority students retreat back to the support and safety of their smaller identity groups. In this way, marginalized students display behaviors with an inward focus. They find their intra-group relationships to be much easier and more comfortable and thus much more appealing. They appreciate having a place to "let their guard down" and "just be themselves." Like their majority peers, they enjoy just "hanging out" in someone's apartment listening to music, eating, playing cards, or watching a movie. As one minority student put it, "if we're

together, we just have fun talking.” Hence, these group settings provide a means of escape from the pressures encountered in the majority culture and present an opportunity for marginalized students to be in a place where cultural differences are accepted and even celebrated. As one student emphasized, marginalized students view these groups as important outlets for fun - - fun that is defined by their own standards and not by the norms of the majority culture:

I think we like fun. I think all our activities have some element of fun or humor. We have so many times that we want to cry, that these times are nice outlets. But there’s cultural differences as to what is considered fun between black and white people. Like throwing food in the cafeteria is not considered fun, because there have been times when some of us didn’t have food to eat, or we had rats hanging from the ceiling. Some of us have bad memories of rats and mice, so we don’t want them around. Therefore, we don’t have time for that kind of stuff.

- - Senior, Female

Forming separate identity groups was one means that minority students used to escape the pressures found within the majority culture. Another means of escape was to leave campus. A number of minority respondents stated that they liked to get off-campus as much as possible. Moreover, as further indication of their separation from Wheaton’s dominant culture, some marginalized students also chose to participate in activities that were forbidden by institutional policies. The most popular “rebellious” activity for marginalized students was to go dancing at various night clubs:

We like to go out to clubs when we can. I like to go dancing at clubs - - off-campus for sure. People do have parties on-campus in apartments and stuff, but it’s never like going off campus. When we go downtown Chicago, it’s the real deal. We’ll go to Wild Hair, Northside, Clark Street - - all downtown.

- - Junior, Male

Whether on or off-campus, marginalized students at Wheaton often choose to “hang out” with one another both to enhance their minority identity and to alleviate their feelings of isolation as individuals. As a result, these students tend to define their existence according to their own group parameters - - parameters that are often characterized by racial or cultural exclusivity. One student summarized this key aspect of the marginalized student type when she said:

Because I’m an Asian person, other Asians on campus are really friendly to

me. At first when I came here I thought it was weird that all these Asian people came up and talked to me, but that's the way it is here with the Asian crowd because they just hang out with each other and they feel comfortable around each other. I think they're that way because that's the way they've grown up. Especially for second generation Koreans, all their friends and stuff is all in the Korean Church. They may have had a few friends from school or something, but most of their friends came from their church. It's like a real community thing for them. . . . Asians are really community oriented. They kind of know each other by the way they relate and interact. That's just how they operate - - not that they can't be friends with other people, but they just hang out with other Asians most of the time. I had one come to me and say that they were having this praise night, and I told the guy that was leading it, "you know, this praise night is called 'Lord of every man,' so shouldn't we have like everyone represented." But the night started as a thing for all the Asian kids on campus who were involved in different churches (Korean churches, Chinese churches, etc.), so because of that, they started this praise night to bring together all the different churches to have a worship time. But I thought it would be really good if we got some different people to be involved, but he just didn't give much thought to it. And I think that's just a natural reaction for Koreans - - to just look at their own group.

- - Freshman, Female

Marginalized students share many similarities with the counterculture students at Wheaton. Both groups separate themselves from the dominant culture and look to their own members for sources of support and personal identity. Both groups follow the norms and standards established by their own groups over any institutional or dominant student culture prerogatives. And both groups seek to educate Wheaton's community about their concerns and perspectives. In many ways, both marginalized students and counterculture students could be considered "marginal" within the student culture at Wheaton. However, the major difference between the two groups is that counterculture students choose to be marginal - - they choose to reject the dominant culture of Wheaton. Marginalized students at Wheaton do not feel this same power of choice. Many believe that they have been intentionally excluded or ignored by the dominant culture. Unlike their counterculture peers, marginalized students want to participate in the dominant student culture, but not necessarily always on dominant culture terms. Marginalized students yearn for integration

and mutual acceptance. Unfortunately, when this does not happen, they feel rejected and often withdraw into their own groups.

For most marginalized students, this rejection is an extension of their experience with the larger American society. Many have experienced and grown accustomed to the realities of racism and prejudice in this country and have accepted a marginalized status in many contexts. But their frustration is heightened at Wheaton because of expectations about a Christian college environment. Many came expecting to find relief and healing from the hurt encountered in society. The disappointment was bitter, then, when they realized that Wheaton College possessed some of these same attributes.

After they accept that Wheaton is not a perfect place, marginalized students typically respond in two manners. The first is to find support within their small groups. These groups represent safety and a source of identity for marginalized students, but also tend to reinforce a marginalized status for minority students on Wheaton's campus. A second response is to fight back. Some marginalized students try to break down barriers and assert their perspectives within the dominant culture. This takes considerable effort and toil, but often proves profitable for both the individual and the institution. Indeed, with increased attention given to minority participation in Evangelical higher education (Nieves, 1987), institutions can ill afford to ignore the suggestions or efforts of marginalized students who take an activist role. The fact that many minority students exist on the periphery of the campus culture also implies that Evangelical Christian institutions must better comprehend the experience of marginalized students. In short, institutions must better understand the complex intricacies of students and their cultures. This awareness of the dynamics between student culture and institutional or "official" culture will be the focus of chapter six.

CHAPTER VI

CONFORMERS AND REBELS: A CONTINUUM RESPONSE WITHIN WHEATON COLLEGE STUDENT CULTURE

Wheaton College is located on an 80 acre plot of land nestled comfortably within a residential setting of Wheaton, Illinois. When approaching the campus from the downtown area of Wheaton, one of the first indications of arriving at the institution is a prominent sign located at the entrance to the campus. The sign, approximately 8 feet high and 30 feet long, is a formidable landmark denoting the firm establishment of the institution. Made of brick and stone and situated in a picturesque setting, the sign typically serves as a popular location for student and family photographs. Yet the significance of the sign goes beyond mere aesthetic qualities. Etched in the sign are the words - - "WHEATON COLLEGE: For Christ and His Kingdom." This slogan, although altered in meaning from its original post-millennialist designation,⁸ is the most predominant representation of the institution's mission. It is listed on many promotional materials and institutional symbols. It is printed on all official campus stationery. And it is often mentioned in chapel addresses, campus publications, and casual conversations.

This slogan is pervasive within the Wheaton College community, in large measure because it reflects the college's goal to integrate Evangelical Christian faith with all of life and learning. As its mission statement reads:

Wheaton College exists to help build the church and improve society worldwide by promoting the development of whole and effective Christians through excellence in programs of Christian higher education. This mission

⁸ Post-Millennialism is a theological view of the end times suggesting that the millennium - - the 1,000 year reign of peace and brotherhood - - is imminent. Post-millennialists believe that Christ will return to earth after the millennium, but in the meantime, the responsibility of each Christian is to improve society and bring on the kingdom. Jonathan Blanchard, founder of Wheaton College, established the slogan, "For Christ and His Kingdom," because of his post-millennialist views (Maas, 1996). Even though the institution has acknowledged numerous other millennial positions, it has retained the college motto as a generic representation of Christian commitment.

expresses our commitment to do all things “For Christ and His Kingdom” (Inform: Bulletin of Wheaton College, 1996-1997, p. 4).

It would not take long for anyone visiting the campus to realize the pervasive influence of its Evangelical Christian culture. The rich Christian heritage of the institution is inscribed on the names of many campus buildings. For example, only a short distance past the entrance sign stands a majestic, five-story, colonial-style building which is named after Wheaton’s most famous alumnus - - the evangelist Billy Graham. Other artifacts of an Evangelical Christian influence on campus include the Christian literature in the bookstore, the display of a missionary “honor roll” outside the president’s office, and the many signs posted on campus announcing an upcoming Christian concert or Christian speaker. Many rituals associated with a Christian purpose are also apparent on campus. Three times a week at 10:30 in the morning students trek across campus to Edman Chapel for a chapel service. During meal times people pause before eating to offer a prayer. And numerous student gatherings are organized on campus for the purpose of worship, Bible study, or prayer. Moreover, institutional sagas characterize the commitment to Christ of various past or present college members. Students often hear the tragic tale of three Wheaton martyrs who sacrificed their lives while attempting to evangelize a jungle tribe in Ecuador. In memorial to these young men, two residence halls (Saint and Elliot) and one athletic field (McCully Field) were renamed in their honor. Even though this tragedy occurred in 1956, its impact and challenge on the college community remains.

Yet, perhaps the most important artifact of the college’s Evangelical Christian character can be found in the institution’s curriculum and co-curriculum. As the Bulletin of Wheaton College states:

Committed to the principle that truth is revealed by God through Christ “in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” Wheaton College seeks to relate Christian liberal arts education to the needs of contemporary society. The curricular approach is designed to combine faith and learning in order to produce a biblical perspective needed to relate Christian experience to the demands of those needs. The founders of the college and their successors have consistently maintained that academic excellence and evangelical Christian faith and practice are essential to that purpose (Inform: Bulletin of Wheaton College, 1996-1997, p. 4).

Thus, faculty attempt to integrate the Evangelical Christian faith with learning by providing

“a liberal arts education that acquaints students with the organized fields of learning in the context of a Christian view of nature, of humanity, and of culture through the study of both biblical and general revelation” (Inform, 1996-1997, p. 4). In that all faculty and staff are required to sign a statement of faith, they understand and support the intentions for integration of faith and learning with all disciplines. However, because the institution perceives biblical authority as the integrating core for a Christian liberal arts education, students are also required to take courses in biblical studies in order that “they may understand more fully the bearing of Christian faith on life and thought” (Inform, 1996-1997, p. 4). In addition to curricular goals, the institution also infuses an Evangelical Christian emphasis into student life through such co-curricular endeavors as required chapel attendance and student adherence to the Statement of Responsibilities. In short, through its mission, values, beliefs, and practices, the “official culture” of Wheaton College emphasizes Evangelical Christian principles and practices as the foundation of a sound education for its students.

Any student who chooses to matriculate at Wheaton College must respond to this Evangelical Christian emphasis. It is unavoidable. Through curricular and co-curricular requirements and through the institutional ethos, students are confronted daily with the reality of living student lives “For Christ and His Kingdom.” The purpose of this chapter is to summarize this study’s major conclusions regarding the student culture at Wheaton College and its relationship to the institution’s official culture. Throughout chapters 4 and 5, numerous examples and connotations have been drawn regarding the interaction between student culture and the official culture. The purpose of this chapter is not to reiterate those findings. Rather, this chapter will offer analytical observations derived from the preceding descriptions of Wheaton’s student culture (chapter 4) and subcultures (chapter 5). Specifically, it outlines three primary conclusions concerning the nature of a student culture on an Evangelical Christian college campus. Additionally, this chapter explores the various implications that this research has for practices and perspectives within Wheaton’s official culture. Finally, it concludes with recommendations for further research.

Analytical Conclusions

Student Culture at Wheaton College is Not Monolithic

Results of this study suggest that Wheaton students respond to the perceived intentions of the official culture in myriad ways. As they approach the tasks associated with a college education, students at Wheaton demonstrate considerable diversity in their value and behavioral choices. This is reflected in the number of student subcultures and dominant student typologies represented on campus. By participating in different subgroups, students develop different interpretations and meanings for their college experience. Thus, contrary to some of the restricted depictions offered in the literature (Hunter, 1987; Riesman, 1981), Wheaton's student culture cannot be characterized as homogeneous.

Indeed, it would be erroneous to assume that all Wheaton students share the same perspectives about their college experience and their interaction with the Evangelical Christian culture. Listen, for example, to the following student's assessment:

I think there is great diversity on Wheaton's campus in the student body, so people who come here can really decide what they want. It all depends on who you want to be when you arrive. Because there are groups of people who take their Christian faith very seriously, and unfortunately others who don't. And there are some groups who are angry with Christianity, so you have a whole spectrum. Socially, there are some groups that hang out and play sports, and others that go into the city. But I would say it's a strength rather than a weakness. I think people criticize Wheaton for being a cookie-cutter institution, but I don't think that's true at all. Wheaton graduates are as different as everybody else.

- - Senior, Male

Much of this student diversity can be attributed to the diversity of cultural backgrounds represented at Wheaton. The college attracts students from all 50 of the United States and from over 40 different countries. Seventy percent of Wheaton students come from outside Illinois (Inform, 1996-1997). Also, Wheaton students represent over 30 different church denominational backgrounds. This is a testimony to the even larger diversity within American Evangelicalism. For example, in their book The Variety of American Evangelicalism, Dayton and Johnston (1991) identified 12 different religious traditions, or currents, that seemed typically to be grouped under the umbrella of American

Evangelicalism. As an interdenominational institution, Wheaton College reflects this same diversity in its student culture.

Indeed, Wheaton students bring to college a rich array of cultural backgrounds from which they have been socialized during their formative years. Consequently, upon their arrival on campus, students do not act as passive cultural participants. Rather, they foster relationships in such a way as to form their own distinct cultures and subcultures. Thus, although it is important to understand their precollege cultural identities (Kuh & Whitt, 1988), it is equally important to recognize the assortment of cultures that students choose to select and form at Wheaton. These different cultures and subcultures represent the variety of ways in which Wheaton students choose to make sense of their college experience.

Students Respond and React to Student Culture More Than to Official Culture

In many ways, the student culture and subcultures at Wheaton are formed in response to expectations of the official culture at an Evangelical Christian college. From the very beginning of their educational experience, Wheaton students encounter the very distinctive institutional mission and ethos of Wheaton College. Kuh & Whitt (1988) note that the more distinctive the institutional ethos, the more likely that constraints on student cultures will be felt. Thus, students at Wheaton feel compelled to make sense of their own personal Evangelical commitments by deciphering what response will be made to the institution's Evangelical culture. However, this response to the official culture is really only an indirect response. In reality, Wheaton students pay more attention to the responses of their peers than they do the positions of the institution. In other words, students individually respond and react to their own peer culture's response to the official culture. Students respond either favorably or antagonistically toward their peers more often than to members of the official culture. Their definitions of group and subgroup identities are based upon reactions (both positively and negatively) to other students and student groups.

This conclusion supports those of others who have conducted studies of student culture (Baird, 1988; Becker, 1963; Bushnell, 1962; Dalton, 1989; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Weidman, 1989). Without always being consciously aware of it, students derive a sense of identity and purpose more often from the values, beliefs, attitudes, rituals and activities

of their peers than from the official culture. The student culture, not the official culture, is often the standard by which students evaluate what is significant about the college environment. Thus, the response of Wheaton students to the official culture is really based upon their acceptance, rejection, or redefinition of their own student culture.

This characteristic of Wheaton students and other college students is really a reflection of a larger social phenomenon in American society. The Industrial Age sufficiently displaced young people from job markets and created a reclassification of young people into a distinct category or "stage" of adolescence (Kett, 1977). With more leisure time, extra money, and new opportunities directed to their age group, young people formed their own "youth culture" as a source of identity and direction. In response to the needs of this new age group, American society created separate structures and institutions for adolescent involvements. These concepts of adolescence, however, only served to segregate adolescents further from interaction with the adult world. These structures flattered, protected and indulged youth, but they also ordered and segregated them from wide ranges of influence and activity. Youth were, in short, sequestered and disenfranchised (Schultze et al., 1991). Left to themselves, young people increasingly turned to their peers for support and significance. In many ways, American "youth culture" has replaced other social institutions (such as family and schools) as the primary source of guidance for young people today. Thus, Holtz (1995) labels this generation of students the "Free Generation" - - free in the sense of being emancipated or liberated to be on their own, but also free in the sense of feeling rootless and adrift. And Willimon and Naylor (1995) identify today's college students as an "Abandoned Generation" - - abandoned from significant adult interaction and support and left to develop their own sense of meaning and purpose.

With these societal factors, it is not surprising that students choose to identify most closely with their own peer culture. In reality, most of the students' time is spent with each other, largely in cultural and social isolation from adults. It is only natural, therefore, that peers become the most constant and pervasive influence on a student's educational experience. Durst and Schaeffer (1992) noted the similarities between college friendships and kinship groups, pointing out that they provide a stable, nurturing and, at times, almost

parental support system for students. Similarly, respondents in this study often cited their friends as the most influential people in their lives. They typically discussed the many things they learned or appreciated about their peer friendships. In fact, as mentioned in chapter 4, many students valued their friendships as the most important aspect of their college experience. And involvement in subcultures (chapter 5) was often predicated upon an interest in specific friendships. It was not uncommon to hear students express satisfaction with the institution or a desire to remain at the college because of what they received from their friendships. Such a sentiment was clearly articulated by several students in this study:

The most influential aspect on your life, I've found, is the other students. The conversations you have often become very deep - - being able to think through some issues with other students is one of the most productive things. There's always people that you can talk to deeply about things you may be struggling with. Ultimately, although the seeds of thought might start in a class, the development really occurs with other students as you're thinking through things, bouncing ideas off others, etc. That's one of the strong points I find about Wheaton - - the real ability to sharpen one another.

- - Senior, Male

To be honest, I think I've learned about as much from my friendships as anything else. I really enjoy the times when we just sit around and talk theology or something. Those times are meaningful to me because my friends are who know me the best. They're the ones who understand what I'm thinking and what I'm trying to argue. They're also the ones I respect the most, so I'm going to listen to them if they have something good to say.

- - Junior, Male

In large measure because Wheaton students value the friendship groups they have formed within the school's broader student culture and subcultures, they tend to be fiercely loyal to fellow group members. For this reason, students seldom "narc" or "rat" on their friends to authorities in the "official culture." For example, students may know of other students violating the institution's Statement of Responsibilities but feel very uncomfortable or unwilling to disclose this information to outside sources. They may even disagree with the perpetrator's actions, and will affirm the importance of community values and the need for accountability, but still not come forward to tell what they know about other students. If they choose to take any action, it's usually to "take care of it on their own." The perception of this football player, although expressing the unique dynamic of a team, is not

unlike the feelings of many Wheaton students.

We did have some problems with some younger guys last year, but we took our own responsibility to take care of it, and if we couldn't do it with ourselves, then we'd take it to the coach. That's the way you're supposed to take care of those things. . . . We take care of it inside and take care of our own before the Dean does.

- - Senior, Male

Students are hesitant to disclose information to representatives of the official culture because they find it difficult to trust authority structures. To do so would entail stepping outside the safety of known boundaries and accepted sanctions within the student culture - - an obvious violation of group norms. Informants may fear personal recrimination from those accused, but more than likely will only fear being ostracized by their friends for being somehow disloyal to the student population. Such an example illustrates the power of peer pressure within the student culture of Wheaton College and students' orientation to react first and foremost to developments in this arena over those in the institution's official culture.

Students Respond to Evangelical Culture at Wheaton College as Conformists or Rebels

For a Wheaton College student, making sense of their educational experience is essentially a task in making sense of Evangelical culture (a task that often occurs as students react to one another's responses to Evangelical Christianity on campus). The Evangelical world-view has implications for everything that a student at Wheaton College would do. The Evangelical emphasis is so concentrated and pervasive throughout the institution's mission and ethos that students cannot avoid a response. Thus, many if not most of their cultural and subcultural decisions are some form of response to Evangelical Christian considerations - - regarding academic life, social interactions, behavioral involvements, or spiritual understandings.

Generally speaking, this response within student culture takes one of two forms - - conformity or rebellion. In other words, some students have a tendency to identify closely with the institution's Evangelical culture and to accept or reinforce its values, assumptions, and beliefs. Other students question aspects of the institution's Evangelical culture and reject and/or redefine its defining characteristics. These assertions, however, assume two

important qualifications. First, students' perspectives are based upon a continuum of responses. On either extreme are students who respond in blind allegiance to complete conformity (as perceived by students) or complete rebellion. As is true with most generalizations, students with extreme perspectives are highly visible but few in number. For the majority of students, a full range of responses representing varying levels of conformity or rebellion exist within the student culture. Additionally, the lines dividing conformity and rebellion are not clearly drawn, and various students may respond differently to various Evangelical components within the same institutional culture. Second, as noted previously, students' responses are based more fully upon their reactions to other students than their reactions to the official culture. Thus, students who tend to conform choose to mimic characteristics of other zealous, conformist students - - students who may take their life commitments well beyond any stipulations from the official culture. Similarly, students who tend to rebel react more strongly against the extreme conformity of some students than to all the regulations of the official culture. Hence, these conformist and rebellious actions are student generated responses to each others' reactions to the Evangelical Christian "official culture" on campus.

Consequently, most of the accommodation or agitation within the student culture is generated from fellow students. The peer pressure to react against or in favor of conformity is very conspicuous among students. Wheaton students feel a powerful pull within the student culture to emulate one type of student (either conformist or rebel) and ignore or discredit the other. Willimon and Naylor (1995) argue that most college students today "lack a meaningful sense of direction, and as a result become compliant victims of external pressures. Their parents, their passions, and the corporation pull the strings" (p. 13). In this case, it appears that the student culture at Wheaton College acts as a compelling "external pressure" on students. While not all students succumb to the extreme perspectives and behaviors of both positions, the pressure to conform or rebel is keenly felt nonetheless. Respondents in this study consistently identified this polarization among students. Consider, for example, how two "conformist" students described this tension:

As with any serious and life changing faith, there is a certain alienation that takes place. There are students who believe and students who really do not

believe. For the students that cannot believe, they look upon that belief and it makes them sick and angry because they wish they could but they can't. The main tension that I would feel is with the students who really deep down in their heart can't believe and don't believe. They look upon this "happy" person who does believe and who relishes that belief and celebrates it with a jealousy and an anger. There are angry students on campus, and I think faith is the central issue to that.

- - Senior, Male

I think there's a definite line between students who hold some form of responsibility and those who don't - - the students that follow the rules and the students who don't. There's a line there and it's an obvious line. And I think there's tension. But an outsider might not see the tension. I pick up on it because of my broad interaction with students, so I know there's frustrations. My friends and I are guilty of saying "I can't believe this person went out and did this - - that's discouraging." I know that those people are thinking that "those other people need to relax." I know they have some tensions with the students who are more uptight about it but are more responsible.

- - Senior, Male

Similarly, notice the awareness of this division within the student culture from the perspective of two "rebel" students:

For a lot of students and for me at times (although I tend to shrug it off), if you're not someone who is settled in your faith, then you have questions. There's people that you can go to here with those questions, but it's still not an easy thing because you get spirituality pushed in your face, especially from other students. It's always there. You have to deal with not only the here and now of what's going on with all your personal and academic troubles, but also your eternal fate. That is a tremendous pressure among the students. I've seen a lot of students drop out because they're depressed and they can't deal with it all.

- - Senior, Female

In some ways I see that the most vocal groups on campus want to go into full time ministry and are really into a type of CSC (Christian Service Council) program. And then there are students who are just callous to all of that. They're still believers and still really take their faith seriously internally, but are just like, "that's not for me, that's weird, that's too much of an expression. I don't need to do that." So I think there may be a lot of students like me, but none of us have the guts to say anything about it. But you can feel divided in two different directions depending on who you're with. Sometimes I don't feel like I fit in either place. So where am I? Am I normal? Am I not spiritual enough, or am I being too provincial? That's been a way that I've felt like I haven't fit in with all students at Wheaton.

- - Senior, Female

Interestingly, one student even postulated that this dichotomy among students is growing at Wheaton:

There's a group of people that hear the word rule and just decide to break it. And it's like the same continuum, because in the middle are people who try to decide where they're going to do it or not, then you have the other extreme of blind allegiance. But I think our ends or extremes are growing at Wheaton, with people becoming more reactive at either end. America in and of itself is dichotomizing, and I think that's leaking over to Wheaton. . . . I think it's causing dichotomies at both ends of the student culture. We used to have more clashes, but now it's just like there's a breaking up. It's like, "let's not fight anymore, let's just split up." And now you've got different cultures. There's a lot of different groups that you'll see break off together.

- - Senior, Male

Evidence within the student culture would seem to support this last respondent's claim. There appears to be increased campus interest for activities that characterize both ends of the spectrum. For example, on the "conformist" end, since the extraordinary "revival" services on Wheaton's campus in 1995 (Beougher and Dorsett, 1995), student "revival" experiences have been more openly and frequently discussed. Also, as an outgrowth of the "revival" phenomenon, student attendance and participation with World Christian Fellowship has exploded. Moreover, student involvement in Christian service activities is becoming increasingly popular for students. One senior student acknowledged this trend when describing features of a typical "college life" activity:

The devotions in SG (Student Government) last roughly a half hour, which is half the meeting. And the people on SG are seeing their roles as more of a service opportunity. Things that were typically the CSC (Christian Service Council) type of stuff are now a part of SG. Before, SG was very much into the governance part of their role. But now, there's this spiritual dynamic. For example, at our retreat there was more praying and singing than there was agenda setting. The service activities at Wheaton are becoming the social activities. WCF (World Christian Fellowship) is the largest activity on campus. OCO (Office of Christian Outreach) and DSG (Discipleship Small Groups) are like the big things on campus. I think you're starting to see these things start to be like the "cool" things to do. None of it is necessarily a bad thing, but it is interesting. You don't dare begin any activity without a devotional.

- - Senior, Male

Students interested in Christian service and college life activities are probably most closely identified with the Evangelical culture of Wheaton College. They also constitute the largest student subgroups. For this reason, they are perceived by students as the dominant student typology on campus - - the "conformists." When comparisons are made, most students on campus compare themselves to this group.

At the same time, even though their overall numbers are smaller in the student culture, a “rebel typology” of students is present on Wheaton’s campus. And while these countercultural and marginalized student groups are by no means decreasing in their significance, their potency and fervor is often felt less within the campus community. This may be attributed to a growing tendency among “rebel” students to withdraw rather than to fight the “mainstream” student culture. Hence, the “underground” Wheaton is not dead, it’s just hidden. As such, its cultural parameters often remain a mystery to most outsiders. Yet, “insiders” to the rebel crowd are very much aware of their own group expectations. As one student attests, peer pressure to rebel at Wheaton can be just as strong as peer pressure to conform:

I think once you go down that road, it’s really hard to turn back. I was drinking at a party once, and now any time I’m with those same people, the assumption is that I’ll just do it again with them. Once you’ve done it, I don’t think anybody would question it (illegal activity) because you just don’t do that. Plus, if you ever turned someone in, they’ve got stuff on you too. So people don’t ever say anything, they just go along with it.

- - Senior, Male

Another student observed how quickly and how extensively students can be incorporated into the “rebel” crowd:

Last year, in as many ways as I could, I deliberately did not fit in with the Wheaton way of thinking and dressing and being. . . . I realized that it was kind of fun to have this look like I was a pledge-breaker. Even when I went to a store, people would look twice at me, which was something I had never experienced. You hear about minorities talking about this, and now I understand. But not only how I looked, but also how I acted. I did start smoking, I did start breaking the rules. I fit in with that group of people who do that - - there is a definite group of deliberate pledge breakers here at Wheaton. So the way I looked, all of a sudden I had new friends. They would invite me to their parties. I went to this one party and this girl was all over me, and the next thing I know she has a bag of hash and guys were going to smoke it. I had never had marijuana before, so I didn’t do it. But I thought it was funny that I suddenly fit in with a group that I would have never fit with the year before.

- - Junior, Male

Since the peer pressure to conform or rebel is so pervasive and powerful at Wheaton, it is not surprising that students often find it difficult to maintain a “middle ground.” Most of this pressure tends to be generated from the dominant student group at Wheaton - - the “conformists.” Through many of their actions, values, or beliefs,

“conformist” students place expectations (either consciously or unconsciously) upon other students to emulate Evangelical prerogatives. Because they associate many of the rules and practices at Wheaton College with a religious intent, most “conformist” students are hesitant to question or doubt any established policy or authority for fear of somehow challenging God’s authority and will. Following the biblical imperative in Revelation 3: 15-16, “conformist” students are zealous in their efforts to never become “lukewarm” in their faith commitments. Similarly, as members of a “faith community,” these “conformist” students also feel a sense of obligation to “encourage or admonish others in the faith.” Some of this encouragement and admonishment has constructive results in the community through such things as accountability groups, positive peer pressure, and friendly, invested admonitions. However, some of their efforts also produce destructive results through judgmental attitudes, caustic remarks, or even malicious behaviors. Students involved in “wrong” behavior reportedly have received disapproving stares or gestures, anonymous “biblical reprimands” or “hate mail” through the college post office, or even threats of personal harm from many fervent, supposedly well-intentioned “conformist” students. The pressure to conform is real - - students feel it. In the end, students often placate the pressure by choosing sides that represent varying levels of allegiance to the cultural mores of either a student-generated “conformist” or “rebel” paradigm.

Implications of the Study for the Official Culture at Wheaton College

The most obvious conclusion from this study is that the student culture has a vibrant and powerful influence upon the educational experience of Wheaton College students. It impacts the way that students are socialized into the community and the meanings they derive from their college experience. For many students, peer interactions and relations are the most important mediating force in their lives - - more so than even parental or institutional influences. As such, student culture is not something that can be ignored by college faculty or administrators.

A recent research project entitled Taking Values Seriously: Assessing the Mission

of Church-Related Higher Education, involved a study of student values at 50 different institutions associated with the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities. This project, while still ongoing, demonstrates the growing interest among Evangelical Christian colleges to assess their effectiveness in accomplishing their stated missions of developing student values (as reported by Olsen, 1997). In assessing their effectiveness, however, most Christian colleges only review issues of quality for curricular or co-curricular programs. Little attention is directed to the impact that peer culture has on the formation of student values. Institutions may have a clear mission statement and set of coordinated educational objectives, but until the experiences of students and their interpretations of these objectives are sufficiently understood, an institution will only have a partial assessment of their educational effectiveness.

Institutions must also understand the role that various student subcultures play in an educational setting. Students are attracted to peer groups with similar values, beliefs, and attitudes as their own. The variety of different campus subcultures, often connected to a particular campus activity, allow students the opportunity to find a protective, congenial atmosphere among a familiar group of peers. Unfortunately, these subcultures often become sterile learning environments where previously held values and beliefs are only reinforced and never challenged. Within a subculture, students find a comfort zone that accommodates their desired needs but seldom exposes them to new forms of learning. Interestingly, a study by Van Wicklin, Burwell, & Butman (1994), using Marcia's (1980) four identity statuses (diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved) to study students at three Evangelical Christian colleges (including Wheaton), found that nearly half of their subjects did not make any significant progress toward identity resolution during the four-year duration of their study, and over 40 percent remained identity foreclosed as seniors. Perhaps these results attest to the powerful influence of subcultures in causing students to acquiesce to group norms without ever developing their own personal sense of identity.

With little question, then, the impact of student culture and subcultures on students' educational experience carries certain implications for an institution's official culture. Members supporting the official culture (i.e. many administrators and faculty) cannot afford to ignore the leverage that peers have on one another. In response, they must

consider what efforts are needed to improve the quality of campus interactions in two different realms - - (1) student peer interactions and (2) student/adult interactions. This section explores various possibilities that exist in this regard for the official culture of Wheaton College. Culture is a complex, multifaceted entity, so any attempt to draw cultural conclusions is necessarily met with only partial success. On this note, the following suggestions are by no means exhaustive but represent only a sample of possible recommendations for the Wheaton College community.

Official Culture Must Provide Opportunities for Improved Interactions Among Peers

When commenting about the pain of dealing with sexual abuse, one junior female student noted that, “the adult staff know how to respond well to this situation, but the students don’t know how to deal with it.” This remark raises an important issue of concern - - what is the quality of interaction among students at Wheaton College? Given that peer culture has a considerable influence on students (Astin, 1993b), is it safe to assume that advice from peers is always beneficial?

Drawing from what was learned in this study, administrators and faculty at Wheaton College could address these concerns with both “conformist” and “rebel” groups. For example, “conformist” students at Wheaton readily acknowledge that most of the pressure for perfectionism comes from themselves or from their peers, not from the faculty or staff. Wheaton students place high expectations upon themselves to be the best and not fail. Thus, any advice they offer to peers is often clouded by their perfectionistic impulses - - impulses that, at times, can be insensitive to the developmental needs of other students. For example, one senior female student observed that, “students at Wheaton tend to focus on the sin of a person but not the pain that caused that sin. Their desire to be upright and holy prevents them from being able to see the real needs of a person.” Conversely, students in the “rebel” group acknowledge “over-reactionary” tendencies and the possibility for poor advice. One’s junior male’s comment about drinking alcohol provides testimony to this effect: “I was starting to feel guilty for doing it (drinking), but I knew if I went and talked to some of my friends, they’d help me see that it really wasn’t that big of a deal.”

Members of the official culture of Wheaton College must recognize that the student

culture is often the most influential reference group for students. Peers listen to peers before they listen to others. However, the official culture must also acknowledge the inability or immaturity of Wheaton students to adequately address many issues or problems related to the college experience. For this reason, the official culture should attempt to improve, not disregard, interactions among students, working with them to create educational moments amongst themselves. The official culture should attempt to focus upon “proactive” education for the general populace of students as much as “reactive” education for the students who struggle with a particular problem. Toward this end, three sample suggestions are offered: (1) develop or enhance peer counseling programs; (2) create residential learning communities; and (3) adjust open floor policies in residential living areas.

Develop or Enhance Peer Counseling Programs. Perhaps one of the most untapped, underutilized resources on college campuses today is students themselves. As noted above, peers counsel peers on a regular basis. That is a given. But questions can be raised as to the nature of that counsel. Some peer counsel can be detrimental to students’ growth. However, with supplemental training and proper channeling, most peer counseling can serve as a rich educational resource. Students can help other students with adjustment issues, personal life decisions, basic study skills, finding appropriate resources, interpersonal conflict resolution, and a host of other counseling needs. With this in mind, faculty and administrators should consider ways to develop peer counseling training on campus that expose students to the potential benefits of positive peer interaction. In many ways the institution has already developed programs that utilize effective peer counseling in specific departments (residence assistants, teacher assistants, discipleship small group leaders, Big Siblings program). However, programs could also be developed that provide opportunities for students to develop more general peer counseling skills unrelated to a particular department or campus activity. The institution already encourages community responsibility and accountability among the students. Peer counseling programs merely represent one structured means for accomplishing and promoting these same goals.

Create Residential Learning Communities. Love et al. (1993) suggest that propinquity and persisting interaction are the most important factors in the development of a strong, resilient culture. This assertion testifies to the importance of residential living as an educational device. Students grow tremendously from living and learning together within a student community. Unfortunately, much of this learning is unrelated (and even antagonistic) to the educational intentions of the institution. This is especially true as upper-class students move out of the residence halls and into apartments, often further isolating themselves from the educational structures of the institution. One possibility for connecting students into meaningful and intentional educational environments is to create residential learning communities. Increasingly popular on many college campuses, these living arrangements provide opportunities for students with similar interests to live together and encourage one another through in-depth explorations of an academic discipline or special interest area. These learning communities could be as varied and diverse as the interests of students, but would essentially create a more intentional learning environment for students to foster more positive, informative peer interactions.

Adjust Open Floor Policies in Residential Living Areas. Numerous respondents in this study cited strained relationships between opposite sex members as a significant problem on Wheaton's campus. Students felt that a stigma was often associated with male/female relationships among students. One junior female described this phenomenon as, "either it's 100% all out, or it's just really goofy." Many students mentioned feeling uncomfortable around students of the opposite sex. Still other students suggested that male/female friendships often functioned on an artificial basis with little vulnerability exchanged. And transfer students from other types of institutions recognized a noticeable difference in these relationships upon their matriculation at Wheaton.

To counter these difficulties within the student culture, those supporting the official culture must seek ways to encourage opposite sex interaction and improved understandings of gender differences. This may take many forms, and certainly long-range plans for a new campus student center are promising. However, in that a large percentage of the student population lives in residence halls, the school's policy on "open floors" (regulated

social parameters through restricted opposite sex visitation hours in residence hall rooms) may need to be adjusted. Respondents frequently identified “open floor” hours as a contributing factor for guarded male/female relationships. From the beginning of their freshmen year, students learn patterns of restricted interaction with members of the opposite sex. These patterns, in turn, effect the perspectives and assumptions related to opposite sex relationships. One student summarized this dilemma on Wheaton’s campus:

I think men and women have a divide between them here at Wheaton. It seems like we’re almost taboo to one another. It’s hard to know how to deal with structuring a college where you’re not getting rampant interaction to a negative extreme on one end or a ‘Bob Jones’ type on the other extreme. You try to find the middle ground. But I don’t know how well as a college we do at that. I think open floors (scheduled hours for opposite sex visitation in student rooms) are something that needs to be changed. I can understand why we do it, but I don’t think it’s working. What it does is it creates almost like “feeding time at the zoo” - - like from 10 to 4 - - okay, it’s time. I can understand why there are restrictions on it if we have it, but it’s just going to a room, where maybe there’s teddy bears or whatever. I can understand why we have the policy, because we want to structure our environment in a certain way, but I think we may have over-structured it in that way to the point where it’s doing us more harm than good.

- - Senior, Male

Certainly, a change in the open floor policy at Wheaton would not need to involve a total abolishment of the policy. Privacy needs and the institution’s commitment to premarital sexual abstinence prevent any radical changes. However, opposite sex interactions may benefit from increased amounts of “open floor” hours. Residence halls may consider providing “open floor” hours at consistently designated times and during afternoon or weekend daytime hours.

Official Culture Must Provide Opportunities for Improved Interactions of Students With Adults

Holtz (1995) suggests that this generation of students turns to their peer culture over parents or other adults because they feel neglected by the adult community. Quality “parenting time” decreased in many American homes during the 1970’s and 1980’s, and many children of this generation had to depend on each other for much of the support and

advice that had traditionally been supplied by parents. Similarly, Willimon and Naylor (1995) argue that today's college students seem very interested in the search for roots, stability, order, and identity, yet feel abandoned by any significant adult intervention in this process. Thus, peer culture seems to have won by default. Students do not reject the institution's official culture as much as feel alienated from it. In reality, many students crave meaningful contact with adults. For example, respondents in this study frequently mentioned their appreciation for involvement with faculty or staff. It is imperative, therefore, that representatives of the official culture of Wheaton College seek to enhance their relationships with students through two measures. First, faculty and staff must choose to get involved with the student culture in order to better understand, support, and mentor students. Second, faculty and staff much seek to improve their interactions with the student culture by focusing on student learning.

Focus on Involvement with Student Culture. For many Evangelical Christian colleges, the official culture's involvement with student culture has vacillated between two extremes of over-involvement or under-involvement. One extreme response is to take the place of parents and enforce firm institutional boundaries for students (*in loco parentis*). The other extreme is to allow students the freedom to experiment with different modes of learning apart from any adult interference (*in absentia*). Parks (1986) refers to this response as "overdistancing," where the official culture moves from a developmentally healthy distancing to a developmentally detrimental abandonment. Students are interested in neither response. They are not looking for parental control, wanting instead to experience the realities of independence. However, they are also not interested in complete detachment that characterizes many of their relationships with adults. The solution may be what Willimon and Naylor (1995) refer to as *in loco amicis* (as a wise friend). They suggest that in place of *in loco parentis*, institutions should consider nurturing friendships between adults and those who are becoming adults in such a way as to develop friendship as the normative means of education.

Research would support the value of this approach. In two different studies of informal faculty-student relationships, Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) and Haworth and

Conrad (1997) found that increased faculty-student informal interaction accounted for significant increases in students' academic performance and self-perceived intellectual and personal development. Quite likely, results would be similar for student interaction with other types of college employees in addition to faculty.

But how often do faculty and staff focus on developing friendships with students? How much of their time is spent trying to merely transfer knowledge to students or accomplish the "tasks" of education? How much is informal interaction with students encouraged? The following recommendations are intended to help encourage and enhance frequent and informal interactions among faculty, staff, and students:

- 1) Faculty and staff should investigate ways to develop mentor relationships with students. Modeling is a powerful teaching method, and mentor relationships offer tremendous learning experiences for both students and professionals. Specifically, in this study, respondents frequently mentioned the need for more female and ethnically diverse mentor figures on Wheaton's campus. An official mentorship program could be developed to achieve this goal, matching faculty and staff with students who have similar interests.
- 2) Although simple in its application, one powerful way to enhance adult/student interaction is to encourage faculty and staff to eat more often with students in the dining hall, especially because students value meals as such an important social time. What does it say to students that faculty and staff have a separate eating area that is secluded from the students?
- 3) Yet another route for enhancing adult/student interaction would be to focus on enlisting various volunteers in local churches to work with students on any number of different activities. Specifically, faculty and staff should reach out to local churches and encourage their members to foster intergenerational contacts with students on campus. Such outreach efforts would help to bridge current age group functions in churches that tend to segregate students from adults.
- 4) Wheaton College should consider developing a location on campus for a "safe haven" where students can interact with adults without having to fear recrimination. The campus counseling center serves this purpose to a large degree; however,

students complain about the lack of counselor availability and the stigma of becoming a “psycho” when utilizing the center. Other possible “safe havens” include a campus house designated for discipleship and confidential conversations between students and a resident staff person living at the house, regular open forums with students, faculty/staff/student devotional and Bible study groups, faculty/staff/student intramural athletic teams and music groups, and so forth.

5) The official culture should continue to provide opportunities for students to be included in curricular and administrative decisions. Such an outlet provides students with rich opportunities to learn about other facets of college life from a group with a perspective that frequently differs from their own.

6) As the institution looks to the future, the official culture must contemplate what effect technology and computer access will have upon student and adult interaction and the potential lack of personal involvement with students. What precautions will the college take, for example, to ensure that these technological advances will not negatively affect the frequency of adult/student interactions on campus?

Focus on Student Learning. In addition to increasing the quantity of adult interaction with students, members of the official culture must also be concerned about the quality of this interaction. In other words, to what degree are faculty and staff fostering student learning through their interactions with students? Because Wheaton College is advertised as a selective institution with high academic standards, it tends to reinforce the perception that the best way to get ahead is simply to “stick with the program” and “work hard” at maintaining the proper credentials. Less attention is given to real learning and more to proxy measures of actual learning, such as test scores and course grades. As long as faculty and administrators continue to emphasize these measures of achievement, it is quite likely that students will continue to focus all their energies on performing well and achieving good grades rather than on learning for its own reward.

If not careful, this focus (a cultural reality that is currently promoted - - wittingly or unwittingly - - by many in the official culture) can foster a passivity for learning among students. From the very first day of orientation, for example, students are told to sit quietly

and be instructed by an “authority.” In classrooms and chapel, the lecture method predominates. Students sit as passive recipients of some objective allotment of knowledge - - what Freire (1970) refers to as the “banking” method of education. This method of education reduces teaching to an activity of depositing bits of information and skills into a presumably empty and passive student mind. Students learn to receive information, master it, and recite it back to faculty on tests and papers to receive “good grades.” While this approach to student learning often generates a passive, “grade-grubbing” attitude among students, it also tends to dichotomize this so-called “learning” from the rest of their life experiences.

Thus, another concern for student learning at Wheaton is that students tend to separate their “intellectual” learning in the classroom from their “trivial” learning outside of the classroom. Many respondents commented about the importance of their academic performance as separate from the rest of their life commitments. In many ways, the official culture reinforces this dualistic mindset among students. Willimon (1993) described this as a far too limited definition of an “intellectual”:

We are following the Enlightenment notions of education. That is, we think about things by stepping back from them; viewing them with alleged ‘objectivity,’ turning specifics into generalities and particularities into abstractions. Although this notion of the human intellect is being thoroughly discredited through post-modern thought, as well as the science of human development, this model still holds sway at the university. Intellectual is what we do to your brain, when we have you in class (p. 13).

It is important, therefore, that adult interaction with students focus upon student learning as more than just classroom involvements. Faculty involvement with students outside of the classroom may alleviate some of this “intellectual” dichotomy. However, non-faculty staff members must also seek to help students integrate their co-curricular and extra-curricular involvements with their entire educational and intellectual experience. In other words, staff members must attempt to create a “learning experience” for students that complements and enriches (rather than works against and competes with) the curricular goals of the institution.

For example, it is interesting to note Hamilton and Mathisen’s (1995) conclusions regarding Wheaton College’s educational attempts to integrate faith and learning among

students. They suggested that the majority of students follow a “value-added” model of integration, where:

Secular knowledge and sacred knowledge do not conflict because they occupy different spheres. The two kinds of knowledge do not change each other in fundamental ways, but they can enrich each other. Thus faith can bring to learning an ethical dimension, an appreciation for the transcendent, and answers to the questions of meaning. Learning can also enrich faith -- helping one to understand how God and his creatures have responded to each other in the past, filling in the details of God’s creative handiwork, and so forth. . . . Questions of value and meaning are dealt with through religious ways of knowing, but they are not seen as an integral part of the academic disciplines themselves (pp. 9-10).

Thus, with a “value-added” approach, faith and learning are never truly integrated. Students participate in many campus religious activities (chapel, Bible studies, prayer groups), but these faith practices are perceived as somehow distinct from their classroom learning. This dichotomy was evident in many respondents’ comments in this study. They appreciated their many campus involvements for developing their faith and valued their classroom experience for learning. To be sure, many Wheaton faculty and staff might be satisfied with such a “value-added” model of integration. Yet this study suggests that such a model is inadequate, for it prevents students from connecting faith and learning with all aspects of life. To advance this latter conception of integration for students, the official culture would do well to consider what efforts are needed for collaboration between academic affairs and other departments on campus. These endeavors could involve alternative pedagogical styles and methods for faculty, as well as expanded efforts among other campus departments for cooperation and coordination of programs. And while such efforts could be potentially time-consuming, the focus on student learning promises to make such adaptations well worth the effort, drawing faculty, staff, and students together in new and creative ways that enrich interactions among all.

Recommendations for Further Research

As with all research projects, this study raises many more questions than it answers. A study of student culture is particularly difficult because culture is such an elusive entity. It is ongoing and constantly changing even during the research process. A complete “snapshot” of all cultural dynamics is virtually impossible. Consequently, many questions and considerations for this study were left unanswered. To be sure, the possibilities for further research in this area are many; however, the following possibilities seem particularly promising at this time.

First, since this study was only a depiction of student culture at one institution, future research is needed that carefully explores student cultures at other Evangelical Christian Colleges. Specifically, comparative studies of student culture(s) at similar Evangelical Christian liberal arts institutions could offer insights into similarities and differences in student culture(s) at these institutions, perhaps leading to the identification of significant cultural factors that contribute to the formation of student subcultures at these institutions.

Second, this study restricted its investigation to the culture created by students while living at Wheaton College. It did not distinguish the cultural background of students before they arrived. Additional research could focus upon the impact of different cultural backgrounds on the types of student cultures created on Wheaton’s campus. Specifically, the effect of church attendance and denominational distinctions on student cultural values and beliefs could be explored, especially as these relate to the objectives of the official culture at an Evangelical Christian college.

Third, just as student culture is not monolithic, it must be acknowledged that the official culture often contains many different subcultural groups. Indeed, faculty and administrative cultures can be very diverse. This study focused specifically on how students within Wheaton’s broader student culture and subcultures made sense of and responded to the institution’s official culture as described within official college publications. Bearing this in mind, future studies are needed that not only explore faculty and administrative responses to the “official” Evangelical Christian character of colleges like Wheaton, but which also investigate how these responses may - - or may not - -

influence students' reactions to the "official" culture as well.

Fourth, additional studies are needed that examine what role gender differences may play in the selection and formation of different student subcultures. These studies would help decipher the interpretive meanings that male and female students give to their college experience. These studies would also offer insight into whether or not male and female students have different developmental and educational needs, and if so, how these needs are addressed by different subcultural groups.

Finally, future studies of student culture should address the characteristics of friendship networks or kinship groups as these support or detract from student subcultures. Research of this type would be useful for identifying the salient factors that distinguish subcultures from affinity or friendship groups and the levels to which friendship groups overlap with different subcultures.

This study is significant insofar as it affirms the findings of other studies on student culture while, at the same time, it clearly documents the impact that Evangelical Christian culture has on Wheaton College's student culture. In other words, it demonstrates that while Wheaton students share many of the same cultural dynamics and subcultures typical of their peers at other types of institutions, they are also unique in their attention and response to the Evangelical mission of their school. While not exhaustive, this study provides an important description of students and student cultures at a distinctive type of higher education institution in America - - the Evangelical Christian college. Because research in this area is minimal, there is a strong need for others to investigate these and other intriguing aspects of Evangelical student culture. Studies of this sort could most definitely benefit Evangelical Christian colleges, providing them with keen insights into their students that, in turn, hold strong promise of helping them to educate and influence students more effectively "For Christ and His Kingdom."

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT REQUEST LETTER

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT REQUEST LETTER

TO: (Wheaton College Student Culture Research Participant)

FROM: Kevin Cumings
Residence Director, Upperclass Halls
CPO 655; ext. 5290

RE.: Participation in Research Project

DATE: January 10, 1996

Dear (Research Participant),

I am writing to request your participation in my research study of student culture at Wheaton College. I am a Ph.D. student at Loyola University Chicago and will be using this research for my dissertation. I am also a residence director in McManis/Evans Hall at Wheaton. For my research I will be interviewing a number of undergraduate students. With your permission, I would like to schedule a meeting time with you for a possible interview (approximately 1 hour). This would be an informal conversation about student life at Wheaton. Attached is a list of possible questions which may be covered in the interview. All information gathered will be held confidential and completely anonymous for any reporting. Your contribution to my study would be greatly appreciated, however you are under no obligation to participate. I will be contacting you by phone in a few days for your response. If you would like, you may contact me by phone at ext. 5290.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kevin Cumings

APPENDIX B
PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following is a list of interview questions that were used during initial stages of research. The questions have been categorized according to the three primary research questions involved in this study.

Category #1: Expressions of Student Culture - - What is the student culture of Wheaton College? How do students make sense of, describe, and enact this culture?

1. If I were a high school or transfer student who was interested in attending Wheaton College but wanted to know more about the place, how would you:
 - a) describe the college to me?
 - b) describe student life on campus to me?

2. What's really important to students at Wheaton College? Name two or three things that students really emphasize around here. What values or assumptions significantly impact student life? How do you pick up on these things? How have you seen these values or assumptions expressed among students?

(Related questions) - - In what ways do Wheaton College students differ from students at other colleges and universities? Do they value different things? Do they engage in different kinds of social activities? What do students do for fun? What stories about Wheaton College students or student life at Wheaton are most significant to you? What is passed down to underclassmen from upperclassmen as important at Wheaton? In what ways were you introduced and socialized into the core values of the general Wheaton student body? What would outsiders visiting Wheaton College see as distinctly unique characteristics about Wheaton students? What do you want your college years at Wheaton to be like? When you graduate, what two or three themes do you hope will stand out as important aspects of your college experience?

3. What do you want to get from your college experience?

(Related questions) - - How do you spend your time? In what activities? Where do you hang out? Who do you hang out with? Paint a typical day in your life as a college student here at Wheaton College.

Category # 2: Expressions of Student Subcultures - - To the extent that there are differences in students' perceptions of and experiences with the student culture, how can these differences best be explained (i.e., student subcultures)?

1. In what ways have you "fit-in" with the student body and in what ways have you felt like you have not "fit" with the college and student body? Why?
2. Are you aware of distinct student communities, peer groups, or cliques on campus? What kind of people belong to each group? Where do these groups hang out? What's important to them? Do these groups have common traditions, activities, jargon, or other distinguishing characteristics that set them apart from other groups?

(Related questions) - - What are some differences in perspectives between different groups of students at Wheaton? What would make a person fit in one group but not another?

3. What are some prevalent tensions among students and student groups at Wheaton?

Category #3: Student's Interpretation and Interaction with "Official Culture" - - To what extent do students accept, reject, or redefine the Evangelical Christian values, beliefs, and practices (i.e., the "official culture") of Wheaton College?

1. I suspect that Wheaton faculty and administrators expect students to act in certain ways - - to place a certain priority on some things more than others. What, in your opinion, do faculty and administrators emphasize to students?

(Related question) - - Describe what you consider to be the basics of a Christian world-view.

2. Do students take these expectations seriously? How do they make sense of faculty and administrative expectations? Do students emphasize other things - - or place a priority on other items - - not emphasized by faculty and administrators? What are these things?

(Related questions) - - How do students perceive chapel requirements and Statement of Responsibility? What is the level of commitment by students to these?

3. Before coming to Wheaton, what were some of your expectations about college life on an Evangelical Christian campus? How has your experience affirmed or altered these expectations?

(Related question) - - What is it about the Wheaton student culture that reflects a distinctively Evangelical Christian campus?

Wrap-up: Please add any additional comments about Wheaton College student culture.

(Related question) - - Please give three words that sum up your experience at Wheaton College.

APPENDIX C
RESIDENT ASSISTANT JOURNAL ENTRY ASSIGNMENT

RESIDENT ASSISTANT JOURNAL ENTRY ASSIGNMENT

Dominant Student Culture

Characterize what you feel are some dominant traits (both positive and negative) of the general student culture on your floor. Think about the prevailing attitudes and beliefs (what you think students think is important), how students spend their time (engaged in what activities), how students interact with one another, where they hang-out, etc. The following is a list of questions (not exhaustive by any means) intended to stimulate your thinking on the subject.

1. What are the real reasons for why students attend college? What do students intend to receive from a college education?
2. Why did the students on your floor choose Wheaton College? Did they find what they expected? What do they like about the college?
3. For what reasons do students choose to get involved in various activities? What is important to them about these activities?
4. What is passed down to underclassmen from upperclassmen as important? In what ways are younger students introduced and socialized into the core values of the general Wheaton student body or the core values of your floor?
5. What would outsiders to your floor (either internal or external to the college) see as distinctly unique characteristics about students on your floor?
6. Describe the “feel” to your floor? What would an outsider learn about Wheaton students by walking onto your floor?
7. What do students on your floor do to demonstrate that they accept someone (the person fits in)? How would one know that the student culture on your floor is inviting to strangers and/or outsiders?
8. What rituals and ceremonies are most important to students?
9. What do students get excited about on your floor?
10. How do students spend their time? What values are portrayed by some of their time commitments?
11. What are the predominant sources of entertainment for students? What kind of music or TV shows are most popular? What do students do for fun?
12. Who are heroes or heroines for students and why?
13. What is it about the Wheaton student culture that reflects a distinctively Evangelical Christian campus?
14. In what ways might the values, assumptions and beliefs of students be different from the values, assumptions and beliefs of the “official culture” (faculty/administration) of Wheaton College?

Student Subculture

Describe what you see as various “subgroups” or “sub-communities” on your floor or in the residence hall. What are the key features of these subcultures? - - i.e. type of students who belong to each, where these subgroups hang out, what these subgroups do together, what’s important to them (in terms of attitudes, values, and beliefs). Again, the following questions are meant to stimulate your thinking on the subject.

1. What are some differences between subgroups on your floor? What would make a person fit in one group but not another?
2. How do the members of a subgroup interact with each other? How is this unique or different from other groups? What are “terms of endearment” special to individual groups?
3. What behaviors would be different between subgroups?
4. What type of person or persons are most respected by each individual subgroup? What type most despised?
5. What would be unique or important about a student’s room that may identify him/her with a particular subgroup on your floor?
6. How do subgroups exclude outsiders? How might they incorporate or initiate a newcomer to their group?
7. What impact do the various subgroups have upon the floor atmosphere?
8. In what ways do the various subcultures incorporate, reject, or redefine the Evangelical Christian values, beliefs, and practices (i.e., the “official culture”) of Wheaton College?
9. What meanings do individual subgroups and subcultures give to common, daily aspects of Wheaton College (i.e. going to class, chapel, residence hall life, floor fellowships, student ministries, intramural sports, etc.)

APPENDIX D
FRESHMEN EXPERIENCE CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT

FRESHMEN EXPERIENCE CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT

TO: Freshmen Experience class

FROM: Kevin Cumings
Residence Director, McManis/Evans
CPO 655; ext. 5290

RE.: Class writing assignment

DATE: October, 1995

This note is in reference to an upcoming journal entry assignment for your Freshman Experience class. I believe that you have been notified of such by your group leader. I am a Ph.D. student and I am performing a research study on student culture at Wheaton College. With your permission, I would like to use some of your comments for my research. All information gathered will be held confidential and completely anonymous for any reporting. If you do not wish to have your responses included in this study, please indicate this on your journal entry.

In your Freshmen Experience course, you have spent some time considering the purpose and intentions of Christian higher education. Now that you have spent some time at Wheaton College, reflect upon your experience thus far, particularly in relation to your interaction with the student culture at an Evangelical Christian college. Student culture is broadly understood as the values, beliefs, attitudes, rituals, and activities that shape how students interact with and make meaning of their college experience. Student culture is a very complex, interconnected web of meanings and perspectives that may consciously or subconsciously influence the behavior of its members.

To reflect upon your experience with Wheaton's student culture, please respond (in 2 to 3 pages) to the following questions:

1. First, before you enrolled at Wheaton, what did you anticipate student life and the student body at a Christian college would be like?
2. Now that you've been here, how has your experience on Wheaton's campus been different from what you expected?
3. What surprised you about student life at Wheaton College?
4. In what ways have you "fit in" with the student body and in what ways have you felt like you have not "fit" with the college and the student body? Why?
5. Describe what you think the student body at Wheaton College values as most important. What is it about this that makes it so important to students? What actions by students demonstrate its importance?

Please feel free to offer any additional comments about the student culture at Wheaton College. After responding to these questions, please return your journal entry to your group leader.

Thank you for your contribution.

APPENDIX E
WHEATON COLLEGE STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

WHEATON COLLEGE STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The goal of campus life at Wheaton College is to be a Christian educational community. While living and learning in such a community bring privileges, they also carry responsibilities. Students, by virtue of their enrollment at the College, agree to accept the responsibilities of membership in the College community.

Purposes. The purposes of this Statement of Responsibilities include cultivating a campus atmosphere in which moral and spiritual growth can thrive, integrating lifestyle with Christian principles and devotion to Christ, removing things that distract students from their calling as Christian scholars, and encouraging members of the College community to see that living Christianly is based on conscious choices rather than mere acceptance of prevailing practices in society at large. The statements made below regarding biblical principles and Christian lifestyle are foundational. They identify the essentials of our Christian life and should remain the desire of those who affiliate with Wheaton College. In addition, the College concerns help to create the kind of Christian learning environment desired by Wheaton College.

Biblical Principles. The Bible establishes basic principles for Christian character and behavior. These include the following:

1. The *Lordship of Christ* over all of life and thought. This involves a life of faith in whole-hearted obedience to the moral teaching of the Bible and careful stewardship in all of life.
2. The responsibility to *love God* with our whole being and to *love our neighbor as ourselves*. Unselfish love should be the motive in all decisions, actions, and relationships.
3. The responsibility to *pursue righteousness* and *practice justice and mercy* to everyone.
4. The need to *exercise our freedom responsibly* within the framework of God's Word, with loving regard for the sensitivities of others.
5. Participation in the *worship* and activities of the church, which forms a necessary context for Christian living.

Christian Lifestyle. Christian lifestyle is expected of all members of the College community. It consists of practicing Christian virtues and avoiding attitudes and actions that the Bible condemns as sinful. Christian virtues that members of the College are expected to exhibit include humility, honesty, a forgiving spirit, faith, hope, and love.

Attitudes that the Bible condemns as morally wrong include greed, jealousy, pride, lust, bitterness, uncontrolled anger, and prejudice based on race, sex, or socioeconomic status. While these attitudes are difficult to detect, they are as subject to the judgment of God as are outward forms of sin. The Bible also condemns such practices as drunkenness, stealing, profanity, unfair discrimination, dishonesty, occult practices, illegal activities, and sexual sins such as premarital sex, adultery, and homosexual behavior.

Responsible freedom implies stewardship of mind, body, time, abilities, and funds. It also requires thoughtful Christian choices in matters of entertainment, associations, and the use of Sunday.

College Concerns. In addition to the moral standards prescribed in the Bible, the College has chosen to adopt rules that foster the kind of campus atmosphere that Wheaton College desires. These rules embody such foundational Christian principles as self-control, avoidance of harmful practices, and sensitivity to the heritage and practices of other Christians. The College requires members of its community to abstain from gambling, the illegal use of drugs, most forms of social dancing, and the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages. Students are accountable for adhering to these rules while enrolled or participating in any College program on or off campus, and from the beginning to the end of each semester, and while residing in College housing. Graduating seniors remain accountable throughout commencement activities. (Students needing clarification of the Statement of Responsibilities are encouraged to talk with one of the Deans in the Student Development Office.)

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VITA

The author, Kevin Dean Cumings, was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on March 9, 1965. He grew up living in the Midwest, attending public elementary and secondary schools in Michigan and Indiana. In 1983, he graduated valedictorian from Sparta High School, Sparta, Michigan. After high school he attended Grand Rapids Baptist College (renamed Cornerstone College) and graduated in May, 1987 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology and minors in sociology and religious studies. While attending college, he was involved with intercollegiate athletics (tennis), the residence life program (resident assistant), and employment at a psychiatric hospital. Following his undergraduate studies, he pursued theological training at Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary. While enrolled he was married to Tina Lee Shepard of North Branch, Michigan. He also worked as a residence hall director at Grand Rapids Baptist College. In May, 1991, he graduated with a Master of Divinity and received special honors for the Leon J. Wood Old Testament Scholar Award and the Christian Education Award.

Immediately after graduation from seminary, he took a position as a residence hall director at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. In this capacity he was responsible for the program supervision of a residence hall housing 460 coed undergraduate students. In August, 1992, he initiated course work in the Doctor of Philosophy program in Higher Education at Loyola University Chicago. After taking a year leave of absence in 1994-1995 to complete his degree residency requirements, he returned to Wheaton College as a residence hall director and supervisor of four residence halls housing approximately 500 undergraduate students. In addition to his administrative responsibilities, he taught on both the graduate and undergraduate level and, in conjunction with his wife, conducted seminars for engaged couples. His professional affiliations include the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and the Association for Christians in Student Development.

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The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education.

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